WITH MASK AND MITT

A.T. DUDLEY

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WITH MASK AND MITT

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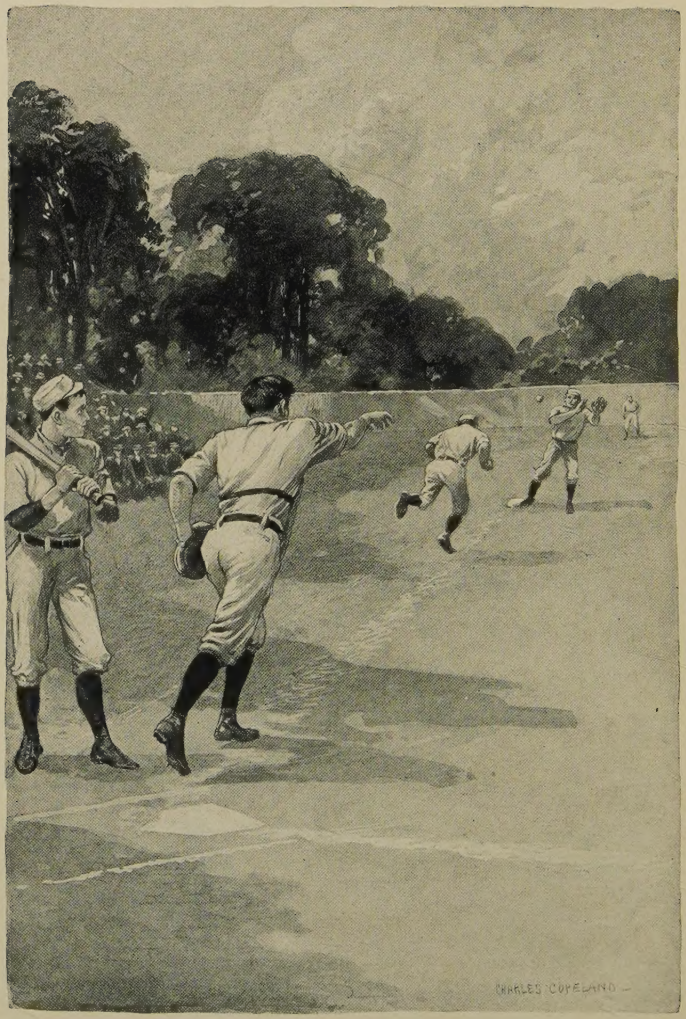

COY WAS NAILED AS HE SCRAMBLED BACK TO THE BASE—AND THE GAME WAS WON.—*Page 293.*

PHILLIPS EXETER SERIES

WITH MASK AND MITT

BY

ALBERTUS T. DUDLEY

AUTHOR OF "FOLLOWING THE BALL," "MAKING THE NINE," AND "IN THE LINE"

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES COPELAND

BOSTON

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WITH MASK AND MITT.

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TO MY FRIEND

HENRY W. ANDERSON

TO WHOSE INITIAL SUGGESTION

THIS SERIES OF BOOKS

IS DUE

PREFACE

THE author has but a word to say in offering "With Mask and Mitt" to his boy readers. The book follows "In the Line" and precedes "The Great Year" in the sequence of the series. While it repeats no incidents of previous books and covers wholly new ground in athletics, it will be found not dissimilar to its predecessors in its general spirit and character. A good juvenile must be one approved by the parent, enjoyed by the boy, and read with profit by both. It should, of course, interest and amuse; it should also help the parent to understand the impulses and the mental attitude of the boy, and the boy to accept the ideals of the parent. If "With Mask and Mitt" does not meet these requirements, it has at least been written with a full knowledge of their importance.

Thanks must again be expressed to Dr. E. H. Nichols of Boston for cordially rendered assistance in the technicalities and theory of the game of which he is an unquestioned master.

ALBERTUS T. DUDLEY.

BOSTON, July, 1906.

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WITH MASK AND MITT

CHAPTER I

TWO APPRENTICES

If, for the beginning of this story, the reader finds himself carried back to the middle of "In the Line," let him not suspect a twice-told tale. The current of school life runs swiftly through its short channel. The present soon becomes the past, the past is soon forgotten. While the hero of to-day enjoys the sunshine of popularity, fondly imagining himself the flower and perfection of schoolboy development, the hero of the future, as yet unrecognized, is acquiring strength and determination for new records and greater triumphs. The scene shifts rapidly; new stories are ever beginning while the old ones are still unfinished.

In those early days of June, while all Seaton was either gloomily anticipating or dolefully bewailing the disastrous Hillbury baseball game; while Wolcott Lindsay, fired by Laughlin's example and spirit, was throwing himself enthusiastically into the captain's projects for the football season, two lads in a town in western Pennsylvania were eagerly discussing plans for the next school year. They had sent to various institutions for catalogues; with the catalogues had arrived circulars, pictures, and letters. But catalogues and pictures are at best but lifeless things; they suggest many questions and answer few. A far better persuader is an enthusiastic alumnus, who puts personality into dull pages of names, and pours a rosy poetic haze over the groups of sombre brick barracks called the school. Such an enthusiastic alumnus had the entrée of the Owen household, with the natural result that Mr. Owen soon became a convert, and a room was engaged for Robert in a Seaton dormitory.

Ned Carle was longer in uncertainty. His father was not as well able as Mr. Owen to bear the expense of boarding-school life, which, like

many other luxuries of these modern days, often seems to cost more than it is worth. Ned himself had not long manifested an intense ambition to go beyond the bounds of the Terryville High School for his education. He was a light-hearted, quick-witted, intelligent fellow, easy-going and friendly, generally liked in town and liking to be liked. He would naturally have been popular if he had never had a baseball under his two fingers; but the fact that he was a pitcher, — and a good pitcher, — not merely established his popularity on a definite basis, but made him in a way a public character.

When Ned Carle pitched on the High School nine and Robert Owen caught, the nine could generally be counted on to win. The battery was well-known outside the limits of the town, which was, in its way, a miniature baseball centre. The standard of play in Terryville was high. Mike McLennan, the famous professional, had once pitched on a Terryville nine; and Mike, when he was at home, took an interest in the "kids" of his native place and gave them the benefit of his instruction. Both Carle and Owen were

started in their careers with professional advice of unquestioned competency.

That Owen received a smaller share of the professional's favor than Carle does not signify that he was an unpromising pupil. For easily imagined reasons Mr. Owen did not regard McLennan as a wholly desirable patron for his son. While he did not object to the boy's learning what the expert had to teach, he distinctly discouraged an intimacy which would expose him to questionable associations and false ideals. Robert, too, was reserved and quiet. The great player valued himself too highly to waste much of his attention on one who showed but small enthusiasm for his teacher.

With Ned Carle, however, the case was different. His father cherished no such inconvenient views as to his son's associations; if he had done so, it would have made no difference, for it usually happened in the Carle family that what Ned wanted the rest of the family ultimately wanted too. Ned took to McLennan and McLennan to Ned as naturally as if they had been born neighbors with only a low fence and a few years' differ-

ence in age between them. The boy hailed the ball player as Mike, chatted with him on the street corners, and listened, credulous and admiring, to all the tales of great deeds on the diamond — McLennan bragged like a Homeric hero — without being shocked by the language or dazed by the improbabilities of the narrative. In return, McLennan laid himself out to make the boy a pitcher, taught him to use his arm properly and to care for it, helped him to acquire effective curves, and coached him in many of the devices by which pitchers outwit their batsmen.

With this tuition and a natural aptitude, Ned Carle made rapid progress as a pitcher. The arts which he had not mastered, he knew something about, and he could talk baseball with the best. As citizens of Terryville will recall, while the "spit-ball" was still in harmless infancy, and only a few master pitchers were experimenting with it secretly, before the newspapers had seized upon the mystery as a means of filling daily paragraphs, Ned Carle was already making sage prophecies as to the tricky new curve, and the havoc it would wreak on batting averages and catchers' fingers.

Indirectly Owen profited by this coaching. When McLennan, as occasionally happened, stopped over a day at his home and gave Carle a few points behind Fosdick's stable, Owen was, of course, called on to do the catching. When McLennan was one summer laid off a whole fortnight for assaulting the umpire, and wished, during this period of idleness, to keep his own arm in condition as well as assist his protégé, Owen was given another and more serious privilege. On eight afternoons the lad faced the professional's fire, guessed at the sweep of his curves, and bravely struggled to grip the ball. There were times when the man pitched at his amateur catcher as if he held the latter responsible for his enforced vacation. The balls came hissing hot, now a high jump that he had to reach for, now a vicious sweep toward his feet, now a wide out that threw him off his balance, now a straight, swift shot that sped like an arrow, looked like a marble in the air and struck his mitt like a blow from a club. Owen worked hard that fortnight, and his hands suffered; but he stood up to his task without a murmur, and had the satisfaction of feeling that he

gained from day to day. He really could not hold McLennan and he knew it, but he had lost his fear of the man; and he never again faced a pitcher with the slightest semblance of timidity.

From much of the baseball wisdom that the professional lavished upon Carle, Owen apparently got little benefit, though the time was to come when he should try hard to recall details of the coaching. One thing, however, he had received directly. It was McLennan who showed him how to snap the ball down to second. The theory only he owed to the veteran; his mastery of the trick was due to his own long and diligent practice. It was not a very swift throw, at least in these early years, but he got rid of the ball with such extreme quickness and placed his throw so accurately that few base runners whom the Terryville battery had to watch found it possible to steal second.

One more circumstance as to this Terryville battery, and we are ready for our story. As a pitcher, Carle, like many another good man, had one serious weakness. At critical times his judgment was prone to be at fault. Three balls

and one strike, especially if there were men on bases and not more than one out, worried him badly. He could usually put the ball where it was wanted even when a failure to do so meant passing a man; but he possessed a strange faculty for trying the wrong ball. It was here that Owen's good sense and cool head served the pair. Owen knew by instinct what kind of a ball promised most in the particular case; Carle could pitch the ball that Owen wanted, and, strange enough, was willing to do so. The combination worked so smoothly, and the pitching was so very effective, that Carle, and even Owen himself, failed to appreciate how much of the strategy of the battery originated behind the bat.

When Rob Owen quietly announced one morning in May that his father was thinking of sending him to Seaton the next year, Carle was immediately seized with a desire to accompany him. The circulars and letters arrived with their tempting invitations. Enthusiastic Alumnus performed his task, cleverly brightening his description of the opportunities of the school with seductive pictures of school life and sport and joyous

fellowship. To the general ambition of the young American to make the most of his life was added the particular ambition of the natural ball player for a wider field for his genius. When Mr. Carle hesitated at the expense which he could not afford, Enthusiastic Alumnus pointed to the long list of scholarships offered and to the many opportunities for self-help open to the earnest student. Ned, grown eager and determined, vowed to content himself with what his father could supply and earn whatever more he needed by his own efforts.

There was reason in the boy's hope. In the high school Ned Carle was counted a good scholar. The teachers were agreed that with equally faithful work the pitcher of the school nine could have ranked far above the catcher. In a certain quickness of perception and facility of expression combined with a memory at least temporarily retentive, he possessed what boys usually consider the most important elements of scholarship. Of industry, the great and fundamental essential, he had as yet shown little development; but as this is the quality least admired among boys and

often the last acquired, neither Ned himself nor his teachers as a whole considered the fault a serious one.

Ned's persistence, seconded by the fluent superlatives of Enthusiastic Alumnus, was more than a match for Mr. Carle's doubts. By midsummer the question was settled. Among the one hundred and twenty-three trunks distributed by Laughlin and his express wagons on the first day of the fall term were two marked "Terryville, Pa."

CHAPTER II

HAIL TO THE PITCHER

THE two Terryville lads roomed apart. Owen had already engaged his room in Hale before Carle decided to accompany him to Seaton; the latter found cheaper quarters in Carter. The difference in character between the two boys appeared in the experiences of their first days in school. Before the first Sunday Ned seemed to be on friendly terms with every fellow in the entry. Rob, on the other hand, hardly knew the names of the occupants of his own floor.

The most interesting of Owen's neighbors were Donald and Duncan Peck, two lively specimens belonging to his own class and section, as indistinguishable and mischievous a brace of twins as ever looked upon the world as a happy hunting-ground, and on the inhabitants thereof as fair game. The tales concerning the Pecks passed on

by his room-mate Simmons, Rob considered barefaced attempts to impose on his simplicity. Later he found that many of them were true. Between the room which he occupied and that of the twins lay, according to one informant, a natural feud. At least such had prevailed the year before in the days of Tompkins, Rob's predecessor. He was advised by Lindsay, the football man who roomed opposite, to ignore this fact and avoid a continuance of the custom; and the stories in circulation concerning the amenities of Tompkins and the Pecks seemed to prove that the advice was both kindly and sound. Beyond Lindsay came Payner, a little, saturnine, black-haired, dark-visaged lower middler from the extreme Southwest; and opposite Payner the two Moons. The other room on the floor was tenanted by a dull-witted toiler named Smith. With Smith an unfeeling Faculty had yoked Crossett, a volatile senior, who spent as little time as possible in the society of his room-mate. Durand shared Lindsay's quarters.

Payner was no ordinary individual. In recitation, Rob was informed, he halted and stumbled,

pretending to know what he evidently did not know, and receiving corrections with an ungracious if not defiant air. Outside he cultivated a morose and forbidding manner, and went his solitary way as if he scorned society. Whether this unsociability was due to homesickness or sensitiveness or a naturally ugly disposition, Rob was for a considerable time in doubt. He was at first inclined to charge it up against homesickness, feeling himself for a time the forlornness of his exile from the home circle, and the burden of his independence. At the end of a fortnight, however, when all trace of discontent had vanished from Owen's mind, Payner remained as sour and taciturn as ever. Rob next ascribed the fellow's conduct to shyness, and put himself to some inconvenience to show himself friendly. All to no purpose; Payner's only salutation was still a niggardly nod of the head and a scowl. He then tried to make a call on pretence of borrowing a book; Payner merely projected his head through the partly opened door and remarked that he had no books to lend. Thus repeatedly discouraged, Rob gave up his benevolent attempts

in disgust; the fellow was too disagreeable to waste a thought upon!

With Lindsay he got on much better, though as the football season advanced the senior became more and more absorbed in the work of the eleven, and had less time for incidental acquaintances. Lindsay's visitors especially interested the newcomer; they were such important characters in the school that he soon came to know them by sight, though they, of course, had no interest in him. Among them were Ware, the manager of the eleven, Hendry, a football player, and big, serious Laughlin, the captain of the team, who appeared but occasionally in the dormitory until near the end of the season, when the conferences in Lindsay's room became frequent. Of the non-football players no one seemed to Owen more wholly desirable as a friend than Poole, the captain of the nine. He was a straight, dark, wiry fellow of average height and weight, with an open face and an air of quiet confidence and simple honesty and unaffected common sense combined visibly with energy and principle. According to Lindsay, Poole pos-

sessed all the admirable qualities except brilliancy. Being but a fair scholar and compelled to work hard for whatever he learned, his classroom performances were not extraordinary and he was not distinguished either as a speaker or as a writer. At the first school meeting, however, Owen learned that Poole's utterances, though lacking in finish, were listened to with greater respect than those of almost any one else; and in all the sub-surface carping and criticism, which is as prevalent in the school world as elsewhere, Poole was more often spared than other conspicuous characters.

"I hear you are a catcher," said the captain one morning, about a fortnight after the opening of school.

"Yes, I've caught a little," replied Owen, modestly. "How did you find that out?"

"Why, your friend Carle told me. He says he has pitched a good deal. Is he good?"

"He's all right!" Owen made haste to say in the hopelessly vague, yet emphatic phrase of the day. "He's the best pitcher of his age I've ever seen! He's got speed, curves, and fine control. He's had a lot of experience, too."

Poole's expressive face beamed with delight. A man who could really pitch and had had good experience was just what he was on the lookout for. In a moment, however, the radiance had passed away and a dubious shade settled into its place. Terryville High School and the famous Seaton Academy were two very different places. Poole had known other much-vaunted performers on high school teams who had not "made good" on the Seaton field. It was a question of standard of play.

"What kind of teams has he faced?" he asked, with doubt showing in both countenance and voice.

Owen understood very well the suspicion that lay behind the question. "Good ones, some of them, and some poor," he answered dryly, smothering the sharp retort that sprang to his lips. "We played other nines besides the high schools. Carle had as good coaching as any young fellow can get. Mike McLennan of the ——'s has had him in hand for several years."

Poole caught his breath, and his eyes danced with joy. A pitcher coached by the famous pro-

fessional whose name appeared as often in the newspapers, if not as honorably, as that of President Eliot or a member of the cabinet! Here was a find indeed! But suddenly a horrible suspicion laid hold of him. He seized Owen by the arm and swung him round so as to bring his face close to his own. "Tell me straight now," he demanded with an earnestness that was almost stern, and looking squarely into Owen's eyes. "I want the truth right now and all the truth. Is his record clear? Has he ever been paid for pitching, directly or indirectly, or been hired by hotels to play summer ball, or been given expense money in a lump so that he could clear a margin — or done anything of the sort? If he's got anything in his record against him, or if he's the least bit crooked or shady, I want to know it before I tackle him. We can't have any questionable men on our teams."

Rob's first impulse was to be angry, his second to laugh aloud; but Poole's earnestness was contagious, and his own second thoughts assured him that the captain's suspicion was natural and his object wholly praiseworthy. Rob had seen some-

thing of the malodorous borderland that lies between amateur and professional. McLennan's vulgarity he could put up with, because of McLennan's marvellous skill in his business. But the third-rater and the semi-professional, who represents a fair laborer or mechanic eternally spoiled to make a poor ball player, and in whom is the essence of all that is lowest and most evil in athletic associations, he viewed with unwavering contempt. So it was with cordiality and inward approval that he looked directly back into Poole's dark, fiercely shining eyes and answered confidently:

"His record's as clear as yours. He's had chances to play for money and refused them. McLennan advised him to keep clear of it until he was through school."

Poole dropped his arm. "I'm mighty glad to hear that. Of course we shall have to look him up, but what you say reassures me. You used to catch him, didn't you?"

"Yes, usually," replied Owen.

"We've got a good catcher now," said the captain, "but we want good men for other positions. Did you ever play in the infield?"

"Not much," answered Owen.

"Well, you must come out and try for the nine anyway," concluded the captain, turning away. "There'll be chance enough for any one who knows the game and can hit the ball."

Owen had an attack of homesickness after that interview which he found some difficulty in shaking off. The Terryville battery had always been Carle and Owen. The Seaton battery was to be Carle and somebody else! It was only a pitcher that Poole wanted; it evidently had not even occurred to him to raise the question whether the new man could possibly be better than the Seaton catcher. And Carle, — well, Carle was friendly, of course, and wished him well, but Carle could hardly be depended on to glorify his old catcher at his own expense. Carle would surely be on the popular side, whatever that was, and would think pretty much as those in authority thought.

"Try for the infield!" thought Owen to himself, angrily. "What experience have I ever had in the infield? Here I've been playing behind the bat ever since I was old enough to hold a ball, and they tell me to try the infield! I'm willing

to try for anything, of course, or play anywhere they want me, or not play at all; and if they've got a better catcher than I am, I'm glad of it, but they might at least say they'd give me a show in the position I'm used to! Well, it's months to the season anyway. I suppose I came here to study and not to play ball, so what's the use of worrying? Father would probably rather have me out of it altogether."

With these inconsequent and not altogether comforting reflections Rob Owen took down his books.

Poole and Borland, the catcher, soon had Carle out for a trial. The pitcher took ten minutes to warm up, but by the end of that time he was throwing all kinds of fast and slow balls as Borland demanded, and putting them over according to the catcher's suggestions. Poole could hardly moderate the expression of his joy into reasonably temperate approval.

"I'm not used to Borland," said Carle, as if to excuse his performance, as he pulled on his sweater and the trio started down toward the gymnasium. "Owen has always caught me."

"How is Owen — good?" asked the captain.

"Pretty fair," said Carle, yielding to the temptation to enhance his own glory by depreciating his mate. "We always worked well together. I presume I shall do as well with Borland."

"I hope so," said Borland.

And Poole said nothing, but he told Lindsay and Laughlin that night in secret that he had found the pitcher who was going to win for them the Hillbury game. Whereat Lindsay and Laughlin congratulated him heartily and turned again to the problem of guard defensive play on an end run which they had been eagerly discussing. Seaton brooks but one great athletic interest at a time.

The football season drew toward its end. As the eagerness of the school warmed to fever heat, Rob had new lessons as to school enthusiasm, and old ambitions sprang into new life. As he stood on the benches at the Hillbury game, — for he stood far more than he sat, — and cheered himself hoarse over the deeds of his heroes, these ambitions grew stronger and more definite. He laid his tired head on the pillow after the evening's

celebration with all the separate impressions of the day focussed in one deep, absorbing longing. What Laughlin and Lindsay and Durand and Hendry and the rest had done that day for their schoolmates on the football field, that he would like to share in accomplishing on the diamond. "Any place, anywhere," he muttered, as his eyes closed, "just a fair chance to show what I can do!" And he dropped off to sleep with the words still on his lips.

School Dormitories

CHAPTER III

NEIGHBORLY ATTENTIONS

THERE was trouble on the second floor in the east entry of Hale. This being the Pecks' entry, and the Pecks habitually furnishing the nucleus for small storm-centres, the mere existence of trouble here would hardly seem worth noting. As this particular trouble, however, led to another which in turn produced a general condition affecting all the occupants of the floor directly, and all the curious of all locations indirectly, — it seems desirable to make a brief statement of the facts in the case.

The Pecks, for reasons of their own, had decided that it was essential to the proper development of the Moons that the latters' room be "stacked." Stacking a room, or "ripping it up," as will be acknowledged even by those who disapprove of the process, is, when compared with its predecessor, hazing, a mild and gentle method of incul-

cating humility and modesty. It consists simply in piling together in as big and promiscuous a heap as possible whatever movable objects the room contains, — furniture, utensils, clothing, ornaments, — and leaving this monument as an interesting surprise for the occupants on their return. It involves, of course, a wanton interference with the property rights of others. It often results in permanent injury to valuable possessions, as when books and clothing are soaked with water, or china is smashed, or some memento dear to the owner's heart is so damaged as to be rendered wholly incapable of ever again suggesting the slightest humanizing sentiment. But the wisdom of boys is not the wisdom of the wise, and the Pecks are not represented in this narrative as models of considerateness.

The Moons were "preps." Their father was a manufacturer who dominated the little town in Connecticut in which he lived. Reginald, the younger, timid and childish, was a "kid"; his brother Clarence, sleek in figure and dress, and ignorantly pretentious by training, foolishly sought to make up for the position of insignifi-

cance in which he found himself at school by dwelling upon his importance at home. The Pecks, sons of a congressman and nephews of a distinguished judge, holding this method of self-glorification quite out of place in the school republic, determined to make clear to the Moons, by a plain object lesson, the value of humility. While the juniors were safely enclosed for a full hour in the Latin room, the law-breaking twins invaded the Moon rooms and spent three-quarters of an hour in rearing a heap which, from its foundations of bed frames to the dome of crockery on top, showed great promise of architectural ability. Then they displayed themselves at the gymnasium and fell in with the Moons on the way homeward, as the swarm of Latinists poured forth from recitation.

They entered the dormitory in pairs, Duncan and Reginald in front, Clarence delayed by Donald's loitering. At the head of the stairs Duncan parted from his companion, and, with the air of one who had important work to do, entered his room and shut the door hard behind him. Once inside, however, this important work proved to

be nothing more than to glue his ear to the crack of the door and wait. He heard Reggie walk down the entry to his room, he heard the voices of the lagging pair rising from the stairs, then quick steps hurrying to meet them, sudden ejaculations, and the dash of all three toward the preps' room. There was nothing left for him then but to bottle his impatience and depend on Donald to give him a fair show.

And Donald proved a safe reliance. The Moons' door opened; voices and steps approached. Duncan had barely time to dart to his desk and seize a book when Donald burst in with Clarence at his elbow. In clumsily feigned surprise, the student looked up at the invaders, his glance resting but for an instant on the countenance of his brother, whose look of malicious joy, poorly cloaked by an unnatural trait of solemnity, would have aroused immediate suspicion in an acute observer. On Clarence's pink-and-white face anger and fright struggled together for expression. Both twins found relief in Donald's exclamation: —

"Some one has ripped up the Moons' room. Come in and see it!"

The trio hastened back to the dishevelled room.

"Gee whiz, what a pile!" exclaimed Duncan in a veritable shock of admiration as he came suddenly in sight of the desolation. He had looked upon his finished work but a few minutes before and found it sufficient; but now, as the scene suddenly flashed its fresh impression upon him, his surprise was almost real. As a monument of havoc the heap was a work of art.

"They didn't do a thing to you, did they! Who was it, anyway?"

"Some fresh guy!" came in answer from Clarence's trembling lips. "He ought to be fired!"

"That's right," declared Donald. "The only trouble is to find out who it is."

"About everything you own seems to be in the thing, doesn't it?" observed Duncan, throwing a glance about the denuded room. "Did they wet it down?"

Wet it down! Poor Clarence gasped with horror, but, recovering himself, sprang forward and felt anxiously about amongst the muddle of bedstead legs, bureau drawers, books, and blankets. There was no sign of water there. He dropped

upon his knees and examined the floor. It was dry. Meantime Donald had screwed his face into a grimace and leered across at Duncan; his double had grinned back and chuckled. This chuckle and the tail-end of the grin Clarence caught as he picked himself up from the floor, and lost in consequence any comfort which he might have derived from his inspection.

"Funny, ain't it!" he cried fiercely. "I guess you wouldn't laugh if it was your room!"

"No, I shouldn't," returned Duncan, sobering instantly. "It's mighty mean of me, I know, but I just couldn't help it. The whole mix-up struck me so hard that the laugh slipped out before I knew it. I won't do it again."

"When was it done?" asked Donald, making haste to get away from dangerous ground.

"While we were in Latin," returned Clarence, somewhat mollified. "Were you fellows at the Gym the whole hour?"

"We were here awhile," confessed Donald, looking hard at the leg of a chair that pointed reprovingly at him from the depths of the pile.

"Did you hear any one come in here?"

In the classroom Donald answered all questions addressed to the Pecks which were not indubitably intended for his brother, but under circumstances like the present, when mother-wit rather than book learning was required, he had the habit of falling back upon Duncan.

"Did we, Dun?" he asked, apparently trying to recollect.

Duncan hesitated. "I guess we were too much interested in what we were doing to listen to outside things," he said at length; and, turning hastily away to avoid his brother's eye, he sauntered around the pile.

Donald likewise sought diversion on his side. "What's this?" he called, pulling out a wad of striped cloth from under the edge of a blanket. "Seems to be wet."

"My pajamas!" groaned Clarence.

Now of course Donald knew what the wad was quite as well as Clarence; but the garments had been so folded and twisted and knotted inside and out that at first sight they offered a very decent impromptu imitation of Alexander's famous Gordian puzzle about which the juniors had been

reading that very day in their histories. So it wasn't really so difficult for the evil-minded Peck to counterfeit surprise and curiosity as he turned the bundle in his hands and made ineffectual attempts to snap it out.

The other tormentor was ready with advice. "You'd better get those knots out right off. If you let 'em dry, you can't blow 'em apart with dynamite."

Clarence ground his teeth and set to work in silence. Donald was pretending to assist him. Duncan, with hands in his pockets, strolled over to the bedroom door, where it was safe to grin and gloat. This was rare fun! Other fellows had had their rooms stacked,—in fact, the Pecks' own room had been treated in much the same way the first year they were in school,—but no one yet had stacked a room and been present as sympathizer at the moment of discovery. And that fool Clarence needed the humiliation if ever a fellow did. "Prince of Bentonville" they called him at home, did they? (This delectable fact Reggie had imprudently confided to some faithless gossip, who joyously published it abroad.)

There was no place for princes here, or babies either.

At the threshold of the bedroom the vandal paused and let his exultant gaze sweep the havoc-stricken room, from the glaring unshaded windows on the right, over the rectangles of dust on the floor where the beds had been, along the festoon of knotted neckties strung between light-fixture and radiator, to the heap of rugs crushed into the corner. On this corner his look hung, and the smirk of satisfaction on his pudgy countenance faded abruptly away. Here, on the only resting-place the dismantled room afforded, lay Reginald, face downward, sobbing his grief into the dusty folds.

Now Duncan, malefactor that he was, had his heart in the right spot. The sight of the little chap plunged in woe through his agency stirred him most unpleasantly. He knew at once that it was not vexation that produced the spasm of tears, but genuine homesickness, made poignant by this wanton act of an unknown enemy; and homesickness appealed to Duncan when weakness and babyishness received no tolerance. He

had been homesick himself once, when Donald with scarlet fever monopolized the house and Duncan spent dreary weeks of banishment with a boy-hating aunt in the country. The misery of that exile was still a painful memory. Poor Reggie! They hadn't meant to discipline that little chap!

He put his hand on Reginald's shoulder. "Come, cheer up, Reggie! It isn't so bad as it looks. We'll soon make it all right again." But Reggie, ashamed of his tears, buried his nose still deeper in the rugs.

"Oh, cheer up!" repeated the comforter. "Lots of fellows have had just as big a stack in their rooms and simply laughed at it. Pluck up, and put your traps back and say nothing about it. That's the way to manage a thing like this. You're man enough for that, I know!"

Reggie sat up, struggling to choke back the sobs. The storm was going by.

"That's the way! Got a handkerchief? Here, take mine. Now let's go out and tackle the mess. I'll take the things down and you put 'em away, see?"

Clarence and Donald were still at work on the pajamas when Duncan appeared in the study, pushing before him the flushed, reluctant Reginald. Duncan yanked a chair from the side of the pile, and standing on it began to strip off the top layer and pass the articles down to Reginald.

"What're you doing, Dun?" demanded Donald.

"Helping these fellows clear up," replied Duncan coolly. "Pitch in, can't you? Here's a pillow, Reggie, catch! and a blanket, too. Get a move on you there, Clarence, and pull out that waste-basket of shirts! We aren't going to do all the work while you stand around with your hands in your pockets. Here! take this towel rack into the bedroom."

Clarence obeyed, though with reluctance. Reginald was hurrying to and fro on his errands with cheerfulness suddenly restored.

"You big fool!" ejaculated Donald, planting himself before his brother's chair.

"Thank you!" returned Duncan, unruffled, with a warning squint in the direction of Clarence. "Why this compliment?"

Donald turned and perceived Clarence staring at the pair with all his eyes.

"Because you ought to be doing your Latin," he answered. "You haven't looked at it; you'll flunk it dead."

Duncan grunted. "*A bas* the Latin. You'll read it to me!"

"Hanged if I will!" retorted Donald, and went out, slamming the door behind him.

Sad to relate, when Duncan returned to his room an hour later, having borne the burden of the restoration of the Moons to order and happiness, Donald read to him not the Latin but a vigorously phrased lecture, bristling with slang and exclamation points, which naturally provoked recrimination, and a long and heated argument. And sadder yet, poetic justice failed to tip the scales in the right direction; the Latin instructor did flunk poor Duncan dead.

CHAPTER IV

PAYNER THE MARPLOT

OWEN might have known nothing of all this had Payner not taken a hand in the affair. Two months of Seaton had improved Payner. His mental attitudes were just as twisted and morbid as ever, and his motto seemed still to be "the world against Payner and Payner against the world," but his truculence had modified sufficiently to allow him to reply when addressed, and occasionally to volunteer a civil remark. He disliked the Pecks heartily and with much reason, for the pair showed him little respect, and would sometimes amuse themselves by shouting across the entry to each other a series of questions and answers on the subject of New Mexico which were not entirely flattering to the inhabitants of the territory. Still nothing had as yet occurred which could be counted an overt act of hostility.

Payner happened along that morning just as Duncan was leaving the rehabilitated room, receiving as he went, in a curious confusion of shame and complacency, the blessings of the Moons. Payner fumbled long at his lock, screwing his head around over his shoulder so as to take in the whole unusual character of the scene, — unusual because boys are not likely to be profuse in their expressions of gratitude, but especially remarkable in that a Peck seemed to have been engaged in a labor of love.

"Has *he* been doing something good?" he asked, jerking his thumb in the direction of the door behind which Duncan had just disappeared.

"Well, I guess!" replied Reggie. "He's just straightened us all out. He's a brick! You ought to have seen the pile when we came in. It almost —" The abrupt ending of Reggie's speech was prompted by a side swing of his elder brother's foot. It must not be inferred that this was Clarence's usual method of guiding Reginald's conversation. He had begun with an unheeded nudge. The kick was effectual, but late.

Reggie turned in wonder, and perceived from

Clarence's black looks that he had said something amiss. While he stood gaping in a startled and uncomprehending manner at his brother, Payner left the door which he had succeeded in opening, crossed the entry, and peered into the Moons' room.

"Where's the pile?" he demanded in the rapid, explosive way which the boys liked to mimic. Payner's phrases were jerked out in diminishing puffs, like the irregular snorts of a laboring gasolene engine.

Clarence said nothing, and Payner, turning his back upon him, addressed himself once more to Reggie.

"There isn't any," replied Reggie. "We've taken it all down. It was right there where the table is."

"Been rough-housed, have you?" asked the visitor, wheeling now upon Clarence, and breaking into a most unsympathetic snicker. "Who did it?"

Clarence scowled. "How do you suppose I know? We found it here when we came from Latin, and Duncan Peck has been helping us clear up."

"Wasn't the other one with him?"

"No, he had to study," explained Reginald; "but Duncan stayed till the last thing was put away. It was awfully nice of him, wasn't it?"

"How'd they happen to be here?"

"Oh, they came up the same time we did, and we called 'em in."

"They'd been at recitation?" persisted Payner.

"No, at the Gym," growled Clarence, who did not see why he should be questioned in this peremptory fashion.

"They'd been here awhile, too," added Reggie, "but they didn't hear any one come to this room."

"I reckon they could if they'd wanted to," Payner observed dryly.

Reggie did not understand Payner's meaning at all, and Clarence only in part. So they stood for a moment in silence; then Reggie spied Clarence's knotted pajamas in the corner of the sofa and was just opening his mouth to exclaim over them, when Clarence spoke.

"Do you mean to say that they knew when it was done?"

"They knew when it was done, and how it was done, and who did it," asserted Payner, boldly. "It's my belief they did it themselves. They're just the fellows to do the thing and then look on and laugh while you grind your teeth. Who else could have done it anyway? I wouldn't, and I couldn't either, as I can prove to you. Owen wouldn't and Smith wouldn't and neither would Lindsay nor any of the other fellows round here. There's only the Pecks left. It's dollars to doughnuts they would and did."

"I won't believe it!" cried Reginald, indignantly.

Payner sniffed. "Then don't. I'll bet all the same you can't find out what they were at all the morning."

Clarence explained the case at length, and Reginald protested, but Payner asserted with undiminished confidence, and departed, leaving behind the memory of various pungent sentiments, such as "they're playing you for suckers," "you'll find out sometime," "you're dead easy for those guys," to work in his absence.

All that afternoon the ferment went on in Clar-

ence's mind. He was too indolent to seek facts to inculpate or clear the Pecks, too sensitive to put the experience wholly from his mind as a mishap of the day which he had fortunately survived. Much more distressed by the suspicion that the Pecks were deriding him than by the mere fact of the "rough-housing," he at last decided to lay the matter before an impartial third person.

Late in the evening, when Owen was busy with the last lines of the Virgil for the next morning's eight-o'clock, Clarence offered himself as a caller, bashfully unfolded his tale, and craved an opinion.

The justice heard the case and gave judgment. He liked the Pecks and did not care for Payner. Like Payner, he judged according to previous prejudice. The Pecks were, to his mind, innocent objects of another's malice, and Payner's suspicions wholly groundless. These were not the judge's words, but they represent fairly well his thought. What he said was that Payner was crazy, which in a general way may or may not have been true.

Clarence departed with pride soothed and composure restored. Rob, in the firmness of his conviction, hurried over to the Pecks to share with them his laugh over Payner's ridiculous charge. He had hardly broached the subject when he began to question the correctness of his recently delivered opinion. The Pecks looked very indignant and protested very loudly, but the manner of their indignation was so clearly forced and their underlying glee so obvious, that the unguarded wink which Donald threw at his brother and which Rob surprised was hardly necessary to confirm the visitor's growing belief that Payner had been right after all. And how the gentle-mannered twins did malign the insolent Payner for his interference! It was none of his business; he was butting in where he didn't belong; he was a fresh gazabo, an uncivilized cub, an outlaw in disguise, who would wreck a train for a pipe of tobacco or shoot a benefactor from behind a fence; he had probably saved himself from being hanged for horse-stealing by taking refuge in Seaton; he certainly belonged behind the bars.

Rob returned to his room with the feeling unpleasantly vivid in his mind that in the matter of the Moons' stacked room he had been guilty of more than one error of judgment.

CHAPTER V

THE FAVORS OF FORTUNE

When Donald Peck greeted the elder Moon next morning, there was considerable coolness in the reply; Clarence's suspicions had revived over night. Later in the day Duncan got hold of Reggie, and succeeded in extracting from him the confidence that Clarence still nourished the absurd idea that the Pecks might have stacked the room themselves.

"It's all rot, of course," said the lad, looking trustingly up into Duncan's face. "I know you wouldn't do a thing like that, and so does he, but he's so wild about it he can't think straight. I told him that if you were the ones you wouldn't have come around as you did, and helped us out."

Duncan glanced away and felt uncomfortable.

"I hate to have him act so," went on the boy; "it seems so much worse since you were so good

about it. He'll get over it in a day or two. I hope you won't mind."

Duncan answered cordially that he shouldn't, and, putting an abrupt end to the conversation, went home to upbraid his brother for getting both into the scrape. Donald jeered at his scruples, averred that it was all for the Moons' real good, and charged him with entering into the scheme without raising objections, and then crawling. Duncan flung back this charge with indignation, and a high-pitched, virulent, and illogical argument followed, wherein all the disastrous enterprises in which the pair had ever engaged were reconsidered and the blame properly apportioned. This scene of mutual recrimination ended only when the inhabitants of the room above fell to thumping on the floor and emitting catcalls and dog yelps; and Payner, who happened to be passing, actually had the effrontery to knock at the door to inquire if any one was hurt.

The instant effect of this last interruption was to divert the angry feelings of the brothers from their former course and combine them against Payner. He was the cause of all the trouble;

without him and his outrageous interference, the Moons would never have had a suspicion. He should be punished; his room should be ripped up, and ripped up thoroughly. The discussion of a plan reinfused in the twins the old spirit of unity and harmony.

But Payner was not so easily caught as the heedless Moons. The twins obtained a schedule of his recitations and laboratory hours, which they agreed afforded the only safe occasions to work. At some of these hours they were themselves employed; at others, when they tried his door, it proved to be securely locked.

Once, indeed, during a laboratory period, they found the door ajar, and pushing it open went boldly in to make the most of their opportunity. Donald was in the van, his eyes eagerly sweeping the walls of the room in search of material suited to his purpose. Duncan, close behind him, glanced over the table, and perceived a bristly head of hair just appearing above the table edge. Before they could draw back, the bristling scalp rose higher, and two savage little eyes looked straight into Donald's face. It was Payner himself, who had

been sent back from the laboratory for the notebook which he had neglected to bring with him.

Donald sprang back speechless. Duncan came forward pulling out his watch.

"Well?" said Payner. He was not given to long speeches, but he could put much vigor into short ones.

"Have you the right time about you?" Duncan asked with a certain degree of composure. "We saw your door open and thought we'd come in."

"So I see," remarked Payner. "He" — jerking his head toward Donald — "seemed rather surprised to find me in."

"It's enough to surprise any one to have a fellow pop up like a jack-in-the-box from behind a table!"

"Jack-in-the-box!" repeated Payner, angrily.

"Well, anything you like," said Duncan, smiling. "Did you say you had the right time?"

"No, I haven't; my time is always wrong."

"Thanks," returned Duncan; "then we won't trouble you any longer. Come on, Don, let's try Owen."

The brothers turned to go. "The next time you come you'd better knock first," shouted Payner. "It'll save your nerves!"

"We'll try to remember," said Donald, who had regained his composure. It was his only part in the interview.

The brothers crept back to their room and there chuckled mightily over their escape. Payner listened to see whether they really did visit Owen, and then locking his door carefully, walked over to the laboratory, far more disturbed by the problem of the Pecks' presence in his room than by any difficulty which an experiment in physics might offer. And Payner did not shine in physics.

After this Payner's door was always locked, and, mischievous as the twins were, they had no heart for breaking and entering. Weeks flew by; Christmas came, bringing the long recess. Owen and Carle both returned to Terryville for the holidays, the latter especially elated. He had got his scholarship. His work in the classroom had flagged a little toward the end of the term, as the seductive influence of popularity made itself felt, but his honest efforts in the first two months

had given him a good margin, as well as impressed his teachers. He knew a lot of fellows, was already patronized by a certain conspicuous set, and enjoyed, as far as it was possible to anticipate the credit of great deeds as yet unperformed, the glory of being the master pitcher who was to win the Hillbury game. It was possible, of course, that these anticipations might prove unwarranted; that Carle's glory, like the great Kuropatkin's military reputation before the battles of Laioyang and Mukden, might not survive the actual test. But at least he had every prospect of being the school pitcher, and this was in itself a definite honor.

Owen had not fared as well. He had worked faithfully, had won fair rank, had made a few good friends; his teachers spoke of him as steady but slow. He had developed no striking qualities to impress his boy acquaintances; he was not witty like Rogers, nor literary like Ware, nor a wonderful scholar like Salter, nor a football hero like Laughlin or Lindsay, nor a track athlete with a record like Strong, nor a musician like Truslow, nor clever with a pencil like Fox, nor a ladies'

man like Richmond, nor even a jolly idiot like Kleinschmidt. To be a candidate for the nine, with the possibility of becoming substitute catcher if luck served, was not in itself and at this early day a sufficient ground for distinction. So Rob had few successes to report to his family on his return. Mr. Owen was satisfied that the boy had honestly endeavored to do his duty in school, and follow the principles laid down in the parental code. In the father's eyes the discouraging outlook for baseball was rather a cause for congratulation. Mrs. Owen was wholly pleased to have her son at home again, and to find him a little bigger and a little stronger and a little more manly than before, but just as fond of his home as ever, and just as interested in all that concerned it. Except for two things, Rob himself was completely happy. One was the disappointment about baseball, which he could not forget; the other, the constant reminder of his inferiority to Carle. When Carle confessed on the train, with a certain imposing air of one whose honors were burdensome, that he had been asked to join the Omega-Omicron fraternity, Rob was smitten hard with jealousy,

but he threw off this feeling in an instant and spoke eagerly.

"That's an honor, isn't it! Are you going to join?"

"I haven't decided yet," replied Carle, negligently.

"Aren't they rather a rich set?" asked Rob, as he ran over the list of several who were reputed to be members. He had picked up a good deal of information during his first term about many things which did not immediately concern him.

"Most of 'em have money, but they don't insist that every one else should."

"I should think that it would be hard all the same," returned Rob, thoughtfully. "You see, there'll be a lot of things these fellows do that you can't afford. You won't want to refuse if you're with them, and you can't stand the pace they set. That makes it awkward for you."

"Oh, they make a way for a fellow who hasn't much," Carle replied. "You see they like to get in fellows that are well known, specially the athletic men. It's to their interest to sacrifice something, if they want the important fellows."

"I'm thinking of you, not of the fraternity," said Owen, resisting another attack of jealousy. It grated on him to hear Carle speak so confidently of his assured athletic position. "It'll be harder for you to study and keep your place in the class, if you're going with those fellows all the time; and then there'll be a temptation to spend more than you can afford."

At this argument, which was certainly worthy of consideration, Carle's face clouded and he burst out savagely: "It's mighty mean to be always kept tied down to figuring on pennies, and have to slave to get a scholarship, when other fellows who haven't anything to make them popular can throw money around and loaf, and float along on the top wave. It isn't right!"

Rob looked at him in surprise. "You don't have to spend money to be popular. There's Laughlin; he hasn't a cent that he doesn't earn, and fellows like Poole and Lindsay and Cutting don't make any show of money if they have it. And who thinks anything of Bowers with all his dough?"

"They have all they need, at least," returned

Carle, "and I haven't. Laughlin's different, but there aren't many like him. All I say is that it's mighty tough to send a fellow to school, and not give him money enough to keep him there decently."

Rob listened without knowing what reply to make. He recalled the eagerness with which Ned had forced his plan upon his parents, his declaration that he would not let himself be a burden to them, and his promise to be content with what they could afford to give him, and rely upon himself for all other needs. Why should he speak as if he had been sent to school against his will and there neglected, when he had besought his parents to let him go at his own risk? And why should he complain at all when he had apparently had complete success, earned a scholarship, and had such prospects of an important place in school life?

Ned's successes were soon known in Terryville. Mr. Carle repeated often and proudly the tale of his son's high rank in his school, and of the great popularity which he enjoyed among his schoolfellows. Ned added the information that he

should probably do the bulk of the pitching on the school nine; he was to begin pitching practice with the regular school catcher after the holidays. When people questioned Rob concerning these statements, as many did, he readily confirmed them; when they asked him further, as some did, why he had not succeeded as well, and why he wasn't "good enough to catch Carle," he laughingly declared his inferiority. When he was safe from observation, however, and the questions returned to him, he had no heart to laugh. The fact that he was "outclassed," as Ned calmly explained it, or better that he had been quietly put aside on the assumption that he wasn't the equal of Borland, while Carle was taken at his own highest valuation and given in advance the honors of achievement — this was indeed an unpleasant subject for reflection. But Rob, though lacking the worldly experience which might have taught him that in the general sifting and settling of life, undeserved elevation usually leads to deserved humiliation, still was fortunate in possessing a modest self-esteem and reasonably good sense. That he envied Carle's rapid rise cannot be denied;

but that he in any way wished his friend ill on account of it, or would have liked to pull Carle down that the difference between them should be less manifest, — this feeling, I am pleased to say, was wholly absent from his mind. Rob Owen was no cad.

A Corner of the Yard.

CHAPTER VI

THE THIRD STRING

When the school gathered again after the holidays, Poole called his candidates for baseball together, and after a vehement harangue in which he sought to impress upon each man the importance of doing his utmost to develop a good nine, whether by making it himself or by spurring on some better man to outdo him, arranged the periods and combinations for winter practice. As the general routine, or as much of it as concerns the fielding and batting, has been described in a former book, the subject must be dismissed here with this passing mention. In the work of the batteries we are more directly interested.

Carle and Borland were put at the head of the battery combinations, apparently with as little hesitancy as if they had been veterans carried over from a triumphant season. The first choice

of hours was theirs, their opinions were listened to with respect; their position as fixtures seemed almost as well recognized as that of Poole himself. In spite of all self-preparation, Rob was almost startled to find what a gap existed between himself and his old battery mate; and as he remembered how often in past games when bases were full and things were going wrong with the pitching, he had guided the bewildered Carle out of his difficulties, he could not help a feeling of pique, nor avoid wondering whether Borland would succeed as well. After Carle, O'Connell, one of the class pitchers of the year before, held the next position of favor, and Poole quietly put down the combination, Owen and O'Connell, for cage hours together. There were also Patterson, a new man about whom nothing was known, and Peters, right fielder on the nine the year before, who was learning to pitch. For these, also, practice catchers were arranged.

From the outset, Owen found his practice with O'Connell unpleasant. It could not have been from any prejudice against the pitcher, for Rob, who was eager for any opportunity

which seemed to offer him a "show," was at first greatly pleased at the prospect of being mated with the man who, before the advent of Carle, had been regarded as the most promising of the school pitchers. Whatever secret hopes he may have cherished of building up a rival battery were in a fortnight wholly dispelled. O'Connell couldn't pitch, and wouldn't learn. He couldn't pitch because his whole idea seemed to be to throw a ball with as big a curve as possible, without much care as to where it was going, or how near the plate it was destined to come; the only ball which he could surely put over was a straight waist ball which any child could hit. He wouldn't learn, because he thought it a pitcher's business to pitch, and a catcher's not to give instruction but to catch. To Rob's suggestions that any kind of a waist-high ball was dangerous, that the best pitcher he ever saw did not cover a width of more than three feet in a whole game, keeping the ball constantly *at* the plate — O'Connell paid not the slightest attention. He was quite unwilling to suppose that a man who had enjoyed the privilege of Seaton

coaching for a year could learn anything from a country boy from western Pennsylvania. The result was that Rob soon ceased to try to help the pitcher, and contented himself with taking the balls within reach in silence and letting the rest strike the net. The loungers about the cage could not have been impressed with the skill of the catching.

One day toward the end of the discouraging fortnight, when Rob was feeling particularly blue over the situation and wondering whether it would not be better after all to let the catching go altogether and take his chances on his hitting for a fielding position, he fell in with Patterson on the way down street, and asked him casually how he was getting on with pitching.

"Not very well," answered Patterson, ruefully. "I can't seem to learn anything."

"Who catches you?" asked Rob.

"Foxcroft," replied Patterson, gloomily. "He's a good backstop, I suppose, but he never tells me anything, and you can't learn by yourself. Poole ought to fix it so that we can get some instruction, I think."

Rob did not answer. He was marvelling at the contrariness of circumstances. Here was O'Connell who might have instruction but wouldn't take it, and Patterson who wanted it but couldn't get it!

"A man who ought to know told me once that I had the makings of a pitcher in me, — the arm swing, snappy wrist, and all that, you know, — but I've had mighty little chance for coaching and no such experience as these fellows here get, so I don't know whether he was fooling me or not. I don't seem to be getting ahead at all now."

"Oh, you mustn't be discouraged," said Rob, unfairly assuming in his own discouragement the right to blame the other's faint-heartedness. "It takes time to learn to pitch."

"It takes something more than time," Patterson declared with emphasis. "A year of the kind of thing I'm getting won't be much better than a month. You don't have to eat a bushel of apples to find out whether they're rotten or not. One is enough."

Rob hesitated. An idea had suddenly occurred

to him, an idea that might be good. Why shouldn't he catch Patterson, and let O'Connell take Foxcroft? He knew nothing of Patterson, it was true, but he did know about O'Connell, and under the circumstances the unknown seemed attractive.

"How would you like to take me for a change, and let O'Connell have Foxcroft?"

Patterson's face spoke instantly a joyful acceptance of the proposal. His words, which came later, evidently represented second thoughts.

"Wouldn't I! But O'Connell would kick, though. He isn't going to swap you for Foxcroft."

"I don't believe he'd mind," returned Owen, with a smile of amusement tinged with sadness. "He can't learn anything from me, so Foxcroft would do just as well. I'd like to catch some one I could work with, and feel an interest in and try to push along. A net would be about as good for O'Connell as I am; all the advantage I have over the net is that I throw the balls back."

"Let's change, then," said Patterson, eagerly.

"If O'Connell doesn't want your help, I do. You'll find me ready to learn all right. You see Poole, — no, I'll see him and tell him we'd like to bunk in together. I don't believe it'll make any difference to him."

Poole was seen, and gave his consent without suggesting any obstacle except a possible difficulty in arranging new hours. O'Connell growled a little, not at losing Owen, whom he considered too officious, but at the notion that he should be given a third-string catcher instead of a second. But the change was made, and the new pair settled quietly down into obscurity, an obscurity which was the deeper in contrast with the glare of publicity in which the first battery displayed itself.

Carle and Borland were the unquestioned athletic heroes of that winter term. Borland showed himself an excellent backstop. His manner was that of one whom no ball thrown by human arm could disconcert. He could take in-curves with his mitt unsupported, tip them jauntily into his right hand, and toss them back with the best air of a professional in a great

city team showing his tricks to a big audience before a game. The lads who in a perennial group peered admiring through the netting would nudge each other and exclaim and wonder; the knowing ones would talk with wise patronage; the ignorant ask foolish questions in awe-struck tones. Then the company would exchange places with a similar squad at the pitcher's end, and, big-eyed with amazement, watch the unintelligible signals, and try to detect the jump or the break, the out or the in, the lift or the drop, which the conductor of the party assured them was to be seen. Those were great days for battery one at Seaton school. No disillusionizing games to shatter the sweet ideal with brutal facts, no heartbreaking succession of base hits, no feverish gift of bases on balls, no missed pop fouls, no overthrown bases, but just fancy pitching, with opportunity for flourishes unlimited, and spectators unanimous in admiration. Poole himself, with all his steady-mindedness and fear of fostering vain hopes, yielded to the general exultation and looked forward with full complacency to the contest of batteries in the spring.

Meantime the humble third string was pursuing its unnoticed way. To his surprise, Owen found Patterson possessed of a very good mastery of one or two curves, and pitching with apparent ease and considerable speed. He was very eager to learn, and so modest as to be entirely distrustful of himself. This fault of timidity Rob sought to overcome by encouragement and by plain lessons from the successes of pitchers whom he had known. When once Patterson understood that by good pitching was meant, not "doing things" with a ball, but merely success in fooling batsmen; and that to accomplish this object, control and speed and cleverness in alternating balls, rather than ability to juggle curves, were of prime importance, the pupil took courage and began to learn.

It was now that Rob regretted that he had not paid more attention to McLennan's words of counsel to Carle when the latter had had his lessons. Much that the professional had said he recalled under the stimulus of the need. Some things about which he felt uncertain he found out from Carle, who, as a rule, however, remem-

bered less of the technical teaching than Owen. But in the main it was the fundamental principles which Patterson needed, and as to these his catcher was well informed. They were left much to themselves. The general public had no interest in the third battery. Poole occasionally looked in on them for a few minutes, but on these occasions Rob, with a perversity perhaps excusable, deliberately kept his charge from showing his best work. With O'Connell and Carle, and others who might be expected to look with critical eyes, he followed the same course, as if he courted obscurity. The result was that the two worked on alone during the long winter practice unmolested by critics, and free from distracting suggestions of would-be helpers.

With Patterson, Rob soon felt himself on terms of hearty intimacy, though at times their relation suggested that of patron and client. So frankly modest was the pitcher, so naturally distrustful of himself and ready to follow another's lead, that outside the cage he fell naturally into the position of follower. He studied with Owen, skated with him, loafed in his room, sided with

him in the discussions, profitable and unprofitable, to which boys' conversation usually runs, and confided to him the facts as to his home life which one usually reserves for his most intimate companion. Yet with all his friendliness and willingness to follow the steps of another better fitted to lead, Patterson was by no means weak. There was a substantial basis of character and principle underlying his naturally trustful disposition. He followed only a presumably wiser guide; he yielded only up to a certain point and in certain directions. While possessing the unusual faculty of recognizing his faults before his virtues, when once assured of his power he would push on undaunted by obstacles. It was this peculiar combination of traits that so endeared him as a friend and rendered him so apt as a pupil. Most young athletes need the experience of the contest to dissipate their conceit, and open the way for development. With Patterson experience was necessary before a reasonable self-confidence was possible.

CHAPTER VII

FACILIS DESCENSUS

CARLE joined the Omega Omicron. This was evident, even before the acquisition of the distinctive hatband, from the furious and absorbing intimacy which he developed with a certain coterie of fellows belonging to the fraternity. A dispassionate observer — Mr. Graham, for instance — would have perceived two distinct strains in the membership of the Omicron: an extravagant set of sports, courting a reputation for fastness; and a steadier, wiser, more manly group of well-to-do fellows who fell in naturally with others possessing similar monthly allowances, without adopting their views or their principles. It was this latter element which procured for the fraternity the countenance of the faculty. If any member of the Omicron had been asked — by his father, let us say, for no

student would have ventured upon such dangerous ground — what kind of fellows belonged to the society, he would have answered emphatically "mighty nice fellows." And the answer would have been in the main true, for the tendency toward conformity is strong in boys, often holding in temporary check the individual instinct which is destined to make the character of the man; and boy loyalty is notorious. But between Durand and Hendry, who represented the best of the Omicron, and Jones and Nicholson, who led the fast set, there was as much real difference as between blades of wheat and blades of grass. Poole and Lindsay belonged to another fraternity.

"You'd better look after your pitcher," said Durand one morning to Poole. "He's getting in debt."

Poole stopped short in his walk and stared in amazement into his companion's face.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," returned Durand, soberly. "He's borrowing and running bills."

"Where?"

"Where does he borrow? Well, Jones and Stratton are two he's borrowed from. There may be more. He's running bills at one drug store anyway, and I think with two of those out-of-town agents that show things down at Perkins's."

"Why don't you look after him?" demanded Poole, angrily. "He belongs to your bunch."

Durand shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not his guardian. I don't run the Omicron, either, as I've told you before."

"You ought to!" retorted Poole. "What did you get him in there for anyway?"

"I didn't get him in. In fact, and between ourselves, I voted against him."

"I should think you might have helped him along anyway, or at least not let your gang lead him off. You knew he was a scholarship man and hadn't money to throw away. Why didn't you stop him?"

"I did try to, Phil; honestly, I did," returned Durand, at last becoming warm; "but what could I do against all you fellows flattering him and praising him and kowtowing to him as if he

were a little tin god? You don't suppose he cares anything for my opinion, do you? You don't suppose that Jones and Stratton and Nicholson are going to throw around less money because he's with 'em, do you? Not on your life!"

Poole thought a few moments in silence. Then he looked up with a smile and dropped his hand on his friend's shoulder. "I don't believe it's as bad as you make out," he said. "You always were prejudiced against the fellow, you and Lindsay too; and I think I know why. Owen's soured because he can't catch Carle here as he did at home. That made him throw over O'Connell in a sulky fit; and now, I suppose, he runs down Carle, and you fellows in Hale take his opinion."

Durand was listening with lips parted and eyes set in a stare of astonishment. "Well, of all the crazy ideas that is the limit! Owen has never, so far as I've known, said one word against Carle to any one. He did say why he changed O'Connell for Patterson. Patterson wanted to learn, and O'Connell couldn't be taught because

he knew it all without telling. You're entirely off about the whole business."

"I hope I am," said Poole.

"By the way, have you seen Owen catch?"

"Of course. I look in on him every now and then."

"What do you think of him?"

"A good, fair man. I was counting on him and O'Connell as second-string battery, but he doesn't seem to want the job."

"Have you heard him coaching Patterson?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. There was nothing remarkable about it."

Durand laughed a provoking, mysterious, sententious laugh, waved his hand, and disappeared into his dormitory entry, leaving Poole to meditate on the conversation. The meditation concerned but one subject, the possible difficulties of the popular pitcher. Of Owen, he did not think again.

The captain's first active step was to make inquiries among the upper middlers concerning Carle's standing. The answers were various, depending largely upon the standard of the boy

questioned. A few whose own records were high, or who remembered some especially striking failures on the part of Carle, were of the opinion that he was falling in rank. The great majority of middleweights considered him, in general, good. After this investigation Poole had an interview with Carle himself, who protested that he was "all right," declared that his debts didn't amount to anything, and avowed the most superior principles.

Poole returned home reassured. When he met Durand in the afternoon he reported the results of his investigations, and jeered at his little third baseman as a croaker. And Carle, after sitting silent at his desk for an unpleasant half hour, and later having performed a little problem in addition and subtraction which apparently gave him no relief, accepted unhesitatingly the invitation of Jones to join him and two others in a drive with a span of horses, though he knew that the livery charge to be divided would be at least five dollars. You can't be mean, if you want fellows to like you!

As a matter of fact Carle's classroom work was

falling off. He was not perhaps conscious of the change, and some of his teachers had likewise failed to perceive the trend. When a boy trots his translations, he may, if he is quick and observant in the recitation room, deceive his instructors for a very considerable time. A good teacher necessarily repeats questions and reemphasizes principles, and Carle was bright enough to take full advantage of opportunities afforded by the recitations. But all the time, as his outside interests increased, and the circle of intimates with whom he idled grew, his study became more superficial. The translation book was no longer reserved for special emergency; it lay open on his desk from the first line of the lesson to the last. His newly developed method in mathematics was to gather all possible solutions from his acquaintances before trying any problems himself. He was growing distinctly clever in the art of cribbing. Still he seemed to be doing fair work, for such a process is one of gradual and secret undermining rather than of open destruction. One does not perceive the extent to which the foundations are injured until the crash comes.

"What is the matter with Carle?" asked Mr. Rice, the young teacher of history, at a faculty meeting in February. "Isn't he falling off in his work?"

Mr. Moore turned on him an indulgent smile. "I haven't noticed it," he said, "and I have him five times a week."

As the young instructor had Carle's section but two hours weekly, this answer appeared to the questioner equivalent to a rebuke; so, taking Kipling's advice to the cub, he thought, and was still. The result of his thinking was first that Mr. Moore, being faculty member of the Omicron, must know Carle's habits of work much better than he himself did; and, secondly, that he was but a tyro at the business, with much to learn, both as to boys and the ways of the school. He did not see that the Principal made a note of his question, or that Lovering, one of the Latin men, and Pope, a middle-aged confrère who had sections in mathematics, exchanged a few words in low tones. Otherwise, he might have felt less chagrin over his apparent error.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST PLAGUE

The inhabitants of the east entry of Hale were enjoying a season of unusual quiet. Duncan Peck, because of unacceptable work, lay under the ban of study hours, — a fact which damped the ardor of both the brothers. Clarence Moon had apparently learned wisdom from experience, for he had much less to say about the exalted state in which he lived at home, and in general bore himself with more becoming modesty. Lindsay and Owen and their room-mates had other ambitions than to be disturbers of the peace, and Payner lived solitary and secure in his fortress. There remained but the conscientious Smith and Crossett the absentee, neither of whom was likely to spend time in fomenting discord in the dormitory.

Smith studied continuously. His lamp was

lighted at five every morning, he was always in bed at ten at night; but between these two periods, except for the time inevitably wasted on meals and devoted to school exercises, he plodded unweariedly at his books. And did he accomplish great things? I wish I could answer yes. I would not willingly detract one jot from the value of habits of industry. They are rough diamonds which Young America is too prone to throw aside for the flashing brilliants of smartness and wit. But the truth must be spoken. Smith's industry earned no apparent dividends. With the gift of great perseverance, nature had also bestowed on him a very thick head, through which ideas soaked but slowly. He rarely got a conception right without having first tried all the possibilities of error. His influence was ambiguous: some jeered at him as an example of the ineffectualness of grinding; others, among whom was Owen, felt a kind of reproof in the patient, untiring, undiscourageable zeal of this oft-discomfited drudge. To most who knew him he was merely "Grinder Smith."

Owen came in one day from cage practice with

Patterson, who had fallen into the habit of doing his afternoon study in Rob's room. At the head of the stairs they met a tall, light-haired boy coming out of Payner's room. Owen nodded.

"Who was that?" asked Patterson, as soon as they were out of hearing. "I didn't suppose Payner had callers."

"His name's Eddy," Rob replied. "No, Payner doesn't have many callers. Eddy and I are about the only ones, I guess."

"Who's Eddy, anyway?"

" He's a senior. I met him once over at Poole's room."

"I wonder what he can find in a freak like Payner," pursued Patterson.

"Payner isn't such a freak as you think," returned Owen. "I couldn't make anything of him for a long time; but when once you've broken through his shell you'll find there's something in him."

"I never shall. No fun in a sour apple like him. Give me the Pecks every time. Payner's just a snapping turtle."

A door slammed in the entry; quick, elastic footsteps, accompanied by a whistle, passed.

"Lindsay," observed Owen.

"Wasn't it great the way he blocked that kick in the Hillbury game!" exclaimed Patterson. "If I could play football as he does, I'd be willing to work a hundred years."

"I'd rather play on a winning nine, myself," observed Rob.

"Would you? I wouldn't. You see, in football you catch the spirit of the thing, and you're swept right along with the gang. There's a swing that carries you. You just rush in and give a big drive for all that's in you. But in baseball it's different. Everybody has to stand around waiting and watching and quivering while one man does the work. When you pitch a hard baseball game, every ball's got to go just so. If it's two inches too high, or two inches wide, or an out when it ought to be an in, it's all wrong. And then there are about a thousand things that can happen whenever a man hits the ball."

Rob nodded in agreement. "And you've got

to be ready for any one of those thousand things. That's where the fun comes in, and the skill. When you know you can handle any ball that's likely to come your way and handle it right, there's fun just in waiting."

"I suppose that's true. I wish I knew as much baseball as you do. Honestly, now, do you think I'm ever going to learn to pitch?"

This was one of the times when Patterson needed encouragement.

"Yes, I do," Owen replied earnestly. "You're gaining all the time. If you're willing to count by the weeks instead of the days, you'll see a gain yourself. You may never be able to do the things with a ball that Carle can do, — he's got a wonderful wrist, that fellow! — but you may be just as good a pitcher."

"As good as Carle!" cried Patterson, with a grin of incredulity. "You're jollying me!"

"Not a bit!" Owen retorted. "You never will see that it isn't what you do to the ball, but what the batsman doesn't do to it, that shows that you are a pitcher. Suppose Carle has ten chances and throws five of them away, and you have

eight and throw away only two, who is the better man?"

Patterson shook his head doubtfully. "It's one thing to stand in the cage and put 'em where you say; it's a different thing to face a batter in a game and feel that he may drive the next one over the fence."

"You can put 'em where I say just the same, can't you?" retorted Owen, sharply, as he opened his books. There was good promise in Patterson, but these attacks of despondency were of distinctly bad omen.

"You didn't tell me how Payner got hold of Eddy," said Patterson, returning again to the topic from which he had been diverted by the ever recurrent baseball.

"Didn't I? Well, Payner is a great fellow for bugs, — in fact, for every kind of animal, big or little, that has more than two legs; and Eddy is cracked on trees and birds. Payner spent all his half-holidays last fall, when he ought to have been at the football games, up the river looking for bugs and slugs. He found Eddy up there watching birds. So they got acquainted."

Patterson emitted a little sniff, midway between a sneer and a chuckle.

"Oh, you needn't laugh! He doesn't loaf away his Saturday afternoons like the rest of us. Why, he's got one of the best collections of *coleoptera* in existence!"

"Oh, has he!" exclaimed the bewildered Patterson.

Owen swung round as if to end the conversation, and raising his book to the level of his eyes, sniggered covertly into its pages. Opposite him sat Patterson, awed into silence by the ponderous polysyllable, of whose meaning he was loth to confess his ignorance. So the study began.

That evening Eddy came in after dinner to see some new specimens that Payner had just received from Florida. It was lecture night, and the bell sounded just as Payner opened the case.

"Look here, Eddy, I want to go to that lecture to-night. It's on the Grand Canyon, you know. Are you going?"

"I don't believe I shall," said Eddy, absent-mindedly, as he picked up a card to which was

pinned a beetle with a rainbow stripe down his back. "That's a beauty, isn't it?"

"Yes, they're all fine. I think I'll hurry over and get a seat. You won't mind, will you? Look at them as long as you want."

"Thank you!" said Eddy.

"And be sure you latch the door, do you hear?"

"All right," said Eddy, passing on to the next card.

Payner hesitated as if not entirely satisfied with Eddy's answer; then turned to the door.

"Just let down the catch, see?" he called once more, pausing with his hand on the fastening.

"Yes, yes, I'll do it," returned Eddy, with a little petulance. It seemed hardly necessary that the injunction should be so often repeated. Payner went out, shutting the door behind him.

Duncan Peck stood in the entry hallooing to some one below. He waited until the steps of the collector of coleoptera died away at the entrance of the building, then crept softly up to the door just closed, and gently tried it as he had done many times before. To his surprise it yielded to the pressure of his hand. Made cautious

by a former experience, Duncan pushed the door very slowly until, through the widening crack, he perceived Eddy, standing before the table intent on the specimens. At this sight the evil-doer closed the door as softly as he had opened it, slipped back to his room, found his brother, and sent him over to the lecture to make sure of Payner's presence there. With great foresight, the Pecks had invented a device suited to just such an emergency as the present. They had prepared a little wooden plug which would almost fill the socket into which the door-latch springs, leaving but a thin edge to catch the latch. This slight hold of the latch would be sufficient to keep the door shut, but quite incapable of resisting pressure. As the locks of all the rooms were uniform, the plug which had been made to fit the Pecks' door could be counted on to produce the same effect on any door in the dormitory. Armed with this burglar's contrivance, Duncan crept back across the hall, pushed Payner's door ajar once more, and inserted his plug; then closed the door again and sneaked back to safety. In a few minutes the twins, secretly watching

from their room, saw Eddy come out, slam the door, and go whistling downstairs. His whistle was still audible in the distance when Duncan stole down the entry and gave a hard push at Payner's knob. The door swung on its hinges. The long-desired opportunity had come at last!

The ripping up of Payner's room was not as thorough a job as that by which the unhappy Moons had suffered. The twins were too much excited, and their eagerness to finish was too great to permit much elaboration. They dragged the chief articles of furniture around the desk; piled the bedding on the heap, and wet it down with a dash of water; smashed the lamp-shade in trying to make it sit securely on top, and filled the fireplace with pictures from the wall. To give distinction to the effect, the precious beetles were taken from their case, and pinned up over the fireplace in a hasty attempt to form the letters of the Latin *Salve.*

When Payner returned from the lecture, half an hour later, he ran into the outworks of the heap, and sent the ruins of his shade crashing to the floor. The twins listened through the crack

of their door, and trembled with excitement and eagerness, lashed by guilty consciences and yet defiant. But this one crash was all they heard. The door did not reopen, and no other sound came from within to indicate the feelings of their victim.

Next morning when they went out to breakfast, they noticed that the card in the indicator at the entrance to the dormitory on which had been written opposite No. 7, *D. and D. Peck*, now bore the legend *The D—D Pecks*. It was Payner's defiance, his challenging gauntlet! But the Pecks, in their vainglory, laughed loudly and feared nothing.

Two nights later when Donald, who was the first undressed, jumped into bed and thrust his feet down into the depths, he uttered a shriek and sprang headlong out.

"What is it?" cried Duncan, turning around in amazement.

"Some awful, clammy thing in the bed!" gasped Donald, shivering convulsively.

Duncan instantly swept down the covers, and displayed a long, serpent-like, dark thing stretched across the bed.

"What is it?" shrieked Donald, dancing on one foot.

"An eel!" replied Duncan, calmly. "It's the season for eels. I wonder if I drew one, too."

He threw open his own bed. At its foot lay a similar reptile. To the neck of each was attached a ribbon of paper bearing in neatly printed letters the legend: "The First Plague."

CHAPTER IX

A NEW INTEREST

THE midweek Seatonian printed a frantic editorial demanding that more fellows come out to try for the relay team. From the tenor of the article one would suppose that some calamity threatened which could only be averted by the timely arrival of a regiment of candidates. The spirit of the exhortation was worthy of Demosthenes. Ignorant that the new member of the staff who was trying his hand at editorials was substituting vehemence for skill after the manner of tyros, Rob was greatly mystified. He understood neither what a relay team was, nor how it could be so shockingly unpatriotic not to come out and try for it. So he asked Strong, the captain of the track team, for information; and Strong, who treated every inquirer as an over-modest candidate, promptly added his name to the list.

Rob fell in obediently with the squad, and presently learned what it was all about. There was to be a team race of one mile with Hillbury six weeks later, at the great invitation winter meet of the Boston Athletic Association. Some other events besides this race were open to Seaton, and a considerable interest in the meeting had been worked up by Strong and Collins the trainer. Salter, a fat, good-natured senior, the butt of many a joke, but at the same time a favorite with the jokers, acted as captain's assistant. It was Salter who undertook to time Owen on his trial run on the wooden outside track that lies in a big, uneven oval in the hollow behind the gymnasium.

When Owen, aglow with warmth despite uncovered ankles and the icy air of February, slowed down a dozen yards beyond the finish line and turned about to learn his time, the fat boy in the big ulster and tweed cap was not to be seen. He had hurried off to find Collins, leaving the runner to take care of himself. This circumstance, taken with the physical reaction which promptly set in, and the frigidity of the wind which whistled past his bare legs and bellied out his thin run-

ning trousers with a cold storage blast, did not encourage Rob in his experiment. He trotted back into the gymnasium, in ill humor with himself and the authorities, convinced that running was not his proper athletic forte, and stoutly resolved to have no more of it.

He was still engaged in piling up fresh arguments to this effect, while he hurried his dressing so as to get back to the tricky geometry original which had caught him in its time-consuming labyrinth. As he buttoned his collar, the tweed cap and voluminous ulster hove in sight.

"I stopped to see Collins," said Salter, "and tell him what good time you made. It's the best any new fellow's done this year!"

Owen stared. "I thought it wasn't any good. I was making up my mind to cut the whole business; I'm not made for a runner."

Salter looked shocked. "Oh, come now, you don't mean that! Why, I told Collins that you were just the man he was looking for to make out the team with Strong, Benton, and Rohrer. You'd be a fool to give up a chance like that to win against Hillbury."

"Or maybe to lose the race for Seaton," Rob replied with some bitterness. "No, I thank you. On a short dash I might do something,—I used to be pretty good at beating out bunts,—but this quarter-mile business is beyond me."

"Didn't I say your time was better than any other new man has made?" demanded Salter.

"But what about the old ones?" Owen retorted.

"Strong and Rohrer can beat it, and Benton probably, but that was your first attempt. You can improve on that."

"So can a lot of other fellows. Here, let me through! I've got to get home and finish an original."

But Salter still blocked the way. "What is it? Tell me and I'll start you on it."

Owen gaped incredulous. "You couldn't do it offhand!"

"I'll have a try at it," said Salter. "Look here, will you drop this quitter's talk about not running if I do the trick?"

Rob hesitated. He knew little of Salter personally, but on general principles he felt himself

safe. No fellow could know the whole four hundred and fifty originals in the plane geometry, and if Salter was like the average sport he couldn't know a dozen. Besides, Salter's geometry dated from the preceding year. To accept would be the easiest way to get rid of him.

"All right," he rejoined, smiling, "but it's like getting money for nothing." He stated the theorem slowly and distinctly, so as to take no unfair advantage. "Want it repeated?" he asked, leering triumphantly into the serious face of his companion, whose knitted brow and abstracted expression showed that he was thinking hard.

"No, I don't," replied the senior, suddenly breaking into a satisfied grin. "It's too dead easy. Look here!"

He drew forth a block of paper from one pocket, a fountain pen from another, with a single flourish of the pen made an almost perfect circle on the paper, and rapidly threw in chords and tangents and added letters.

"That's what you want to prove, isn't it? Well, this is the way it's done."

At the end of a minute Rob stood with the slip of paper in his hand blushing to think that he had made so much of a simple matter, while Salter was calmly replacing his block and pen in his pockets.

"You're in for it, all right. Of course, you know, I don't mean that you're sure of the team, but you've got a mighty good show, unless something unusual happens. There's Strong now."

Strong stopped just long enough to congratulate Owen on his trial, and to tell him he had a good show for a position. The captain was followed by the trainer. When Rob emerged from the gymnasium a few minutes later he carried in his hand Salter's notes, and in his mind certain regular practice appointments with Collins. Startlingly sudden as had been his precipitation into the ranks of the relay men, he felt less elation on this account than amazement at the quickness with which the senior had opened a rift in the obscurity of the geometry. How could a fellow like Salter, who didn't look remarkably clever and certainly hadn't studied geometry for at least six months, give an im-

promptu demonstration like that! Was that the way in which originals were to be solved? If so, Rob Owen might as well get accustomed to a back seat; such feats were hopelessly beyond his slow powers!

Unreconciled to the notion that an hour of his time was not equivalent to a minute of another's, he stopped at Lindsay's room to ask for information.

"Salter? Of course I know him, — a good fellow he is, a perfect shark at lessons. You couldn't expect a man of his build to be athletic. What do you want to know about him?"

Rob told his tale, adding rather shamefacedly that he suspected there was some trick about it.

Lindsay laughed. "Not a bit of it. That's just the thing he can do. He's got a kind of X-ray mind for mathematics; he can see in a flash through all sorts of obstacles that we have to take a lot of time to work around. You can imagine what an awfully discouraging fellow he is to be in a class with. Why, he'll short-circuit a solution that a teacher's got out of a key, and find an easier way to do it."

Owen felt relieved. He evidently wasn't such a fool after all.

"Salter's best in mathematics, but he's good in everything. Last year he made a complete card catalogue of all the places and definitions in ancient history, with abstracts and dates and all that sort of thing written out on about three hundred separate cards in the neatest kind of a hand. He might have made a small fortune renting it out the fortnight before the examination, but he just let it go round, and of course some fellow was mean enough to take it off with him."

Owen had his hand on the door-knob. "They've roped me in for that relay business. Strong says I've a show to make the team. Do you think it's worth while? I can play ball a little, and I'd like to make the nine, but I don't care for running."

"If Collins wants you, I'd run," advised the senior. "He knows what he's about. It won't hurt your chances for baseball, and it's worth a lot to beat Hillbury at anything. They have mighty pretty prizes for that meet, too. Oh,

have you seen what the school gave the football men?"

It was a little engraved football of gold, bearing Lindsay's name. Rob handled it with reverence and yearning. How he would like to earn a thing like that!

"It's pretty," said Lindsay, "but as I don't wear a watch charm, it's hardly useful. If it were a medal, now, I could put it up somewhere."

Rob's eyes were resting on the mantel. Two silver cups were there which he had never seen before. Lindsay's gaze followed Rob's while his words anticipated the visitor's question.

"I brought those two back with me when I went home last week. Got them both last summer. The two-handled one was for a yacht race, the small one I got in a swimming match."

"What a beauty!" exclaimed Owen, taking up the heavy, ornate cup by one of its handles.

"All the same I prefer the other," returned Lindsay, "for I won that all by myself. Anybody with a fast yacht can win a sailing prize. I had to beat seven men to win that little swimming cup. Two cups don't amount to much

anyway. It's the running fellows that make the collections."

"Strong must have a lot," sighed Owen, in the tone a poor man might use in speaking of a neighbor's millions.

"It takes a college crack to pile them up," Lindsay observed. "Poole has been in Dickinson's room at Harvard, and he says Dickinson has a velvet shield two feet square, just thatched with medals, to say nothing of the cups all around. Just imagine what it must be to go to a great meet like the intercollegiate, and know in advance you're going to beat every one of the hundred men in your event! That's what Dickinson's been doing for the last two years."

Rob tried his imagination, but it would not serve. It was like seeking to conceive stellar distances!

"I must be getting back to work," he said. "I suppose I may as well go in for the relay, even if I don't accomplish anything."

He said good-by, and returned to his desk for another attack on the original. Salter's notes proved an Ariadne's thread for the labyrinth;

in ten minutes he was writing Q. E. D. at the foot of his sheet of paper with a satisfaction dimmed only by the fact that the demonstration was not wholly of his own making.

A rattle at the door now announced that he in turn was to be visited. He knew the rattle, for it always heralded the coming of a Peck; but to-day he fancied it lacking in assurance, and he looked up at the door in a momentary thrill of curiosity. There were two Pecks this time, both unusually grave in aspect. One carried in his hand a covered pasteboard box.

"More eels?" asked Owen, giving way frankly to the snicker which would come.

The bearer of the box, whom Rob had provisionally fixed upon as Duncan, grinned sheepishly and answered: "No; guinea pigs this time."

"Guinea pigs! Where?"

"In the desk drawer, two of 'em," went on Duncan, trying hard to be jocose. "They are really quite — quite sweet. Want to see 'em?"

Duncan raised the lid of the box a finger's width and Rob peeped in.

"Pretty, aren't they!" observed the grinning

Owen. "What are you going to do with them? I thought animals weren't allowed in the dormitories."

"That's just where the chump's meanness comes in!" burst out Donald. "We couldn't throw the things out alive, of course, and we couldn't kill 'em. Lady Jane" (the matron) "came in on us while we had 'em on the table, — caught us with the goods on us, she thought, — and jawed us like a stepmother for defying the school rules. When we said some one put 'em in the desk drawer, she thought we were lying and threatened to have us fired for breaking the rules and not showing her proper respect. I call it a low-down trick!"

"Here's what we found with them," interrupted Duncan. "What does it mean?"

Rob took the slip of paper on which was written in print: "The Second Plague."

"I suppose it means what it says," he remarked.

"And there are more plagues to follow?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"How many do you suppose!" exclaimed Rob, derisively. "How many plagues of Egypt were there?"

"That's the question," replied Duncan. "I say there were three, and Don says there were seven. Which is it now?"

Owen sniffed. "You fellows had better join Dr. Norton's Bible class, and learn something."

He took down a Bible from his bookcase and fluttered the leaves to the chapters in Exodus in which the plagues are described. "The first was turning the river into blood, so that the fish died, the second frogs, the third lice, the fourth flies, the fifth —"

"Oh, ring off!" shouted the impatient Donald. "Don't harrow our feelings with all that. How many were there, can't you tell us? or don't you know yourself?"

"Ten," answered Rob, curtly, replacing the book.

The brothers stared at each other blankly, each seeking comfort and finding none.

"You don't really think Payner'd be mean enough to put all those on us, do you?" Duncan asked after an impressive period of silence.

"There's a whole menagerie to draw from, if he's cussed enough," growled Donald.

"Who was cussed enough to rip up his room?" Rob's visitors sought information, not judicial criticism; but the opportunity was one that he could not resist.

"How does he know that we stacked his room?" For the moment Donald was like an unfortunate victim of circumstances pleading "not guilty" to a false charge.

"How do you know that he is sending the plagues?" Owen replied quietly.

"He's got you there, Don," said Duncan. "We're up against it all right. There's no use trying to squirm."

"Who's trying to squirm?" retorted Donald. "Let him bring on his plagues — a bunch of mummies if he wants to. He won't feaze me."

With this the pair departed to continue their analysis of the situation in their own quarters, and later to endeavor to sell the guinea pigs to a drug-store man to display in his window.

CHAPTER X

MR. CARLE WANTS TO KNOW

THE winter was wearing away. The third battery was plodding steadily along at its task in the cage, with few critical spectators and almost no interference from superiors. A more eager, trusting pupil than Patterson no teacher ever had. So ready was the pitcher to take the suggestion of his catcher as a maxim, that Rob had to set a watch upon himself, that he might not overload the docile learner with useless or questionable directions. He kept to a simple system of coaching, told Patterson nothing of which he was not himself sure, trusted him to throw his curves in his own way, but held him inexorably to accuracy. Owen never would allow practice to begin unless with plate in position and pitcher's distance well marked; he made his pitcher warm up thoroughly before he began with curves; he would not permit a pitch without a distinct understanding as to what the ball was to be.

At the beginning Patterson had but a single ball of which he was sure, — which he could deliver as he wanted it, and when it was wanted. On two or three others he was uncertain, sometimes successful, more often wild. Owen's task was to construct out of these possibilities the "three bread and butter balls" which form the chief stock in trade of the good pitcher. Stated thus simply the task would seem simple; in fact, it was most difficult, although Patterson's implicit confidence in his catcher and absolute eagerness to take his advice smoothed many obstacles from the path.

Few boys are willing to believe that the great pitchers achieve their greatest success through the clever manipulation and variation of a very small number of curves. When Owen repeated McLennan's assertion that three or four good balls, with brains, were enough for any pitcher to use, Patterson believed him and strove for the three good balls; when Owen explained that the most deceptive ball for a good batsman is not a new one with an unexpected curve, but a familiar one with speed disguised, Patterson set to work to acquire a change of pace with the same apparent method of

delivery. In the beginning Owen would hold his hands where the ball was to come, and hold them there again and again until the right ball did come. When a certain accuracy with the three bread and butters was attained, the catcher would place his hands over the plate shoulder high, and require a certain ball to be thrown at them, repeating the exercise a foot to the right and to the left at the same height, and in the three corresponding positions just above the level of the knee. Sometimes he got in a batter to add distraction to the problem. Having early discovered that Patterson could throw a very good jump ball, he made him practise on the "initial cutter," a ball which just skims the breast of the batsman, and which even an expert is frequently tempted to strike at, though he knows he cannot hit it safely.

The mere fact of Patterson's implicit dependence would have been enough to impress Rob with a sense of responsibility. As the weeks went by, however, another fact which gradually forced itself into recognition added seriously to this feeling. Patterson was splendid raw material, which the catcher was either developing or spoiling in

the course of his lessons. To become a superior pitcher, one must be physically capable of applying great power suddenly and convulsively. This ability may be expected only in an intensely nervous temperament, in which muscles are doubly powerful under excitement, or in one of absolutely cold blood, which grows colder and more tense and more silently fierce as the strain of the contest increases. Patterson was of the former class, quick and snappy in movement, with concentrated impulse and muscles answering instantly to stimulus. In addition to the right temperament he was blessed with the ability to "get up," that is, to start the ball with a full arm swing which makes it possible to bring the body into the movement and increase greatly the radius of the throwing arc. His curves, moreover, came easily, and his arm did not readily lame.

Over against these excellences were to be set lack of experience in the field, and an inclination to nervousness and faint-heartedness which only a series of unquestioned successes or the quiet support of a trusted battery mate would be likely to dispel.

While the third string battery was thus busy with its serious but unregarded work, Carle was riding hard along the road of popularity. He was rarely by himself these days, except when he slept. He loafed away many study hours in other fellows' rooms, spoke contemptuously of serious work, trotted his lessons whenever possible, loved to show himself in the company of supposed swells, was frequently seen lounging in druggists' windows or standing in a group of noisy fellows at the crossings with hands bulging the pockets of his wide trousers, talking loudly and swaggering. Though Carle as a scholarship man was expressly debarred from smoking, Poole neither by admonition nor exhortation could succeed in keeping the cigarette wholly from the pitcher's lips — and why indeed? Did not most of the great professionals smoke even in their playing season!

"He's a dead sport, that Carle!" remarked Duncan Peck one day during an interval between plagues. "I don't see how he can pitch."

"But he can," replied Owen, to whom the remark was made, "or at least he could last year."

"Oh, I know he can," Duncan made haste to

reply. "Haven't I seen him do stunts in the cage? It's great, but he doesn't seem quite the kind of fellow that makes a fine athlete, like Laughlin, for example, or Lindsay, or Strong, or any of those fellows."

Owen did not reply. He held no brief for his townsman. Carle had long since ceased to manifest any desire for Owen's society, and Owen, in natural pique, would make no advances on the basis of their old friendship. Their ways seemed destined to lie apart.

One day early in March a letter was delivered at Rob's room, addressed in an unfamiliar hand, yet bearing the well-known postmark "Terryville, Pa." He had just come in from the gymnasium, where Strong had announced to him the final decision as to the make-up of the relay team which was to compete in Boston on the following Saturday. Owen was the choice for fourth man over Jacobson, who, though perhaps no slower, had been adjudged less capable of holding up under strain. With thoughts fluttering excitedly under a variety of emotions, among which half-hearted regret and a sort of dread had place with elation,

Rob gazed at the address on the envelope, and vaguely wondered who could be the sender. He felt for the moment actual resentment at being compelled to exchange the temporarily glorified Seaton atmosphere for the uninteresting common air of Terryville. The letter, however, had much more to do with Seaton than with Terryville. It ran as follows: —

"Dear Robert, —

"Is anything the matter with Ned? We are worried about him. I have just had a letter from the secretary of Seaton saying he has been put on study hours, whatever that is, for unexcused absences and for neglecting his work. The dining hall also sent me another notice that the last bill had not been paid. I sent Ned the money for it more than two weeks ago. He keeps writing for money, but don't say much about himself, and can't seem to answer any questions at all. We've lived awful close this winter to keep Ned away to school, and the last money I had to take from the bank, which I really hadn't ought to do. What makes the school cost so much more than

they said it was going to? Are they sticking us, or ain't Ned doing right? I've talked with your father, but he don't seem to know. I wish you'd talk with Ned and put him straight if there's anything the matter. He thinks a lot of you. When he was home Christmas everything was fine; but there's been a change somewhere. I'm a poor man, and can't do for him like your father does for you, so I wish you'd be careful not to put him up to being extravagant. He's free-handed and easy led, and likes to do the same as his friends. Now, Robert, just remember his ma and me kind of hold you responsible for the boy, and try to help him and us.

"Yours truly,

JOHN H. CARLE.

Throwing the letter with a violent snap into the corner of the room, Rob rested his elbows on the table, dropped his chin into his two hands, and contemplated the rows of books in the case with eyes that saw nothing and a mind upheaved in indignant protest. Relay team and baseball were forgotten, and along with them the French verbs

which he had failed on at the last exercise, and the appointment for an English conference which it was hazardous to miss. Vehement thoughts like his insist on sole possession. He tempt Carle to extravagance, have influence with him, be responsible for him! What an utterly false and unfair assumption! What right had Mr. Carle to send him that kind of a letter, or suppose any such thing, when for two months Ned had done no more than nod to him when they chanced to meet in the street? It was outrageous! It would be better to write the father plainly the facts in the case, incredible as they might appear, rather than suffer longer under the unjust imputation.

To this the feeling of loyalty, strongest and most unreasoning of all healthy student instincts, interposed its veto. He could not write the father of the shortcomings of the son, any more than he could declare them to the school authorities. Indeed, it was not necessary to do so. He had given Mr. Owen in his yesterday's letter a tolerably full account of conditions, and his father might tell Mr. Carle as much as he chose. It was tough business for Mr. Carle.

Rob rose and went to the window, his thoughts now diverted from his own side of the matter to the sacrifice and disappointment of the Carles. It was certainly hard on the parents; he felt sincerely sorry for them. How could Ned play them so false!

Rob turned from the window, picked up the crumpled letter, took his hat, and went out. Mr. Carle had asked him to have a talk with Ned. He hated above all things to do it, but sooner or later his conscience would drive him to it, and it was better to have the disagreeable task over at once than to worry for days and then do it. — Besides, there was very little probability that Carle would be at home.

Haynes White was just coming out of Carter 13 as Rob approached. White was a clever senior who did tutoring in upper middle subjects. The query flashed into Rob's mind, as he knocked at the door, whether White was there to help Carle get ready for the history examination which was due on the following day. There was nothing wrong in this, to be sure, though it was hardly to be expected that scholarship men would have money to spend in tutoring.

Carle greeted him with politeness and visible surprise; then waited to learn the reason of his visit. Rob also, suddenly confronted by the necessity of putting his plea into fitting words, stood for some seconds speechless, unable to think of any diplomatic way of broaching an unpleasant subject. The constraint at last grew too painful to be endured. Abandoning all hope of devising a proper opening, he held out Mr. Carle's letter and said: "Read it!"

In silence, but with flushed face and a defiant hardening at the corners of his mouth, as if he expected reproof, Ned took the letter and read it through. When he had finished, the flush was deeper, and anger as well as defiance displayed itself in his face.

"What does he want to write you all that stuff for! I don't see what business it is of yours."

"He seems to hold me responsible."

"The old man is all off; I should think you'd know enough to let the thing alone."

"But, Ned, he isn't all off," answered Rob, sailing blindly in. "He's wrong if he thinks you're following my lead, but he's right about the

main thing. You're living the wrong kind of a life here. A fellow in your place can't run with the fast gang you're going with. You simply can't do it; you'll ruin yourself trying to."

"That's easy enough for you to say," retorted Carle, hotly, "when you can have whatever money you want, and aren't in with anybody. If you're in the swim you've got to spend something. My old man ought to have kept me at home if he didn't mean to give me what's necessary. I'm no long-haired grind."

"But he can't give you more; he says so in the letter. He hasn't it to give."

This was an unfortunate fact against which argument was as powerless as acid against oil.

"Is that all you've got to say?" asked Carle, sullenly, after a brief period of silence. "Because if it is, I've got something I'd like to do."

Yes, that was all. Owen could think of nothing else to say, and took his dismissal willingly. It had been an unpleasant scene, but brief; he had tried to do his duty in the matter, and even if he hadn't been wholly skilful, he felt relieved that it was all behind him. Poor Mr. Carle!

CHAPTER XI

THE RELAY RACE

Only the actual competitors were allowed to leave town for the Boston meet, so unless he could contrive to receive mandatory invitations from friends to spend Sunday in Boston, or devise especial business to call him peremptorily to the city, the average student must abandon all hope of seeing the contest. Wolcott Lindsay, who lived in Boston, went home for the Sunday, and got an invitation for Durand. One boy had to visit his dentist, another his guardian, a third a doctor, a fourth to buy absolutely necessary clothes which could not be procured at Seaton. The twins, who took an extraordinary interest in the event from the moment they learned that their neighbor was on the team, canvassed at great length the prospects of getting away. Duncan was on study hours and could hope for no favors, but he persuaded his brother that the only fair way was that Donald, whose scholarship usually

secured him the favor of teachers, should ask permission on certain plausible grounds, and the two then draw lots for the privilege of going, the one left behind in any case to represent Duncan. Unfortunately for the scheme, when Donald applied for his permission he was obliged to confess that he had received no specific invitation to visit his aunt in Brookline, and that in the whole course of his stay in Seaton he had never, until this particular Saturday, felt the serious nature of his family obligation. So the scheme came to naught, and the Pecks stayed at home.

The huge space of the Mechanics Building on Huntington Avenue was circled by deep fringes of spectators packed in double galleries and crowded close to the outer edge of the thirteen-lap track. Here were phalanxes of boys from Boston schools, straining their throats in crying up the courage of their schoolmates; college youths in rival camps, their emulous cheers varying through a wide range, from the staccato spelling of some college name to the "three long Harvards" of the Cambridge men; women and girls who brought to the contest tense interest and strong

sympathy, if not expert knowledge; men who loved athletics for their own sake, who, if they did not "delight in the strength of a horse," certainly "took pleasure in the legs of a man." It was like a dozen tournaments and a dozen audiences crowded into one.

Saturated with the feeling that the Seaton-Hillbury struggle was the event of the day, and new to the whole medley of many institutions contesting in ceaseless uproar, Owen was at first both bewildered and discouraged. In the terrific din the crack of the starter's pistol and the bellowing of announcers were well-nigh drowned by the blare of band music, the cheers of untiring supporters, and the recurring waves of general applause. He watched the Harvard-Pennsylvania relay match, in which veterans ran like blooded race horses amid tremendous excitement, and felt still more disheartened. The place seemed so vast, the interests of contestants so diverse, the big college teams so all-important, that the Seaton-Hillbury race could hardly prove more than one of the minor details of the meet, — in fact, might be carelessly managed or neglected. And yet,

as he knew well, to the impatient waiters for a telegram at Seaton, there was but one contest in the day's programme; and no explanation that it was but a small part of a great performance would be accepted in palliation of defeat.

There seemed no end of contests and no beginning, but just one long series of overlapping performances. In the area belted by the big wooden track a cloud of contestants had been engaged in running off interminable heats in the forty-five yards dash. Jeffrey, the Seaton representative, did not reach the semi-finals. Meantime, giants of many medals and astonishing records, gathered by invitation from all points of the compass, were tossing the sixteen-pound shot in the space reserved for that amusement. The six hundred yards handicap men were strung out, according to the privileges they had received from the handicapper, a third of the way round the track; but near the starting-line they were herded like cattle and sent off in a drove. Rob's courage was at its lowest ebb as he witnessed the wild scramble at the first corner, where one unfortunate fell against the legs of another, and put three men

out of position. It was hard to obtain a fair chance under these conditions.

But Rhines of Seaton got a place at the finish, and the waiting relay man felt better. Immediately afterward, he was pursuing with breathless attention a fiercely fought contest between two rival Boston schools, in which the leadership shifted with every lap, and the victor passed his competitor within ten feet of the finish line. The announcer shouted out the time, which proved to be but a trifle slower than the college men had made, the crowd roared, the camp of supporters of the victorious team just opposite yelled and threw their blue banners in the air, — oh, no, the big teams weren't the whole thing by any means!

"Good, wasn't it!" said a fat man, beaming at his friend in the corner of a seat near where Rob was standing. "But if you want to see two teams fight for their lives, you just wait for the Seaton-Hillbury race. They're terribly scrappy fellows."

It may not have been a compliment, but Rob took it as such, and held up his head; yet how he longed to have the whole thing successfully over,

or at least for the return of the old sense of individual security which he had always felt on the ball field, even under the most untoward circumstances.

The Seaton-Hillbury men were called. Away over in the distant corner, a little knot of spectators became suddenly excited; a tall, broad-shouldered fellow stood forth and swung his arms. Before him were the boys who had had to visit their tailors, their dentists, their doctors, their guardians, their dear relatives in city or suburbs. The familiar Seaton cheers rang out, feeble and far away, yet filled with a message of confidence and support. Rob felt the thrill of gratitude as he recognized Wolcott Lindsay leading the cheering, and saw the little group swelled by recruits from Seatonians in college, who pressed in about the nucleus. The team was not friendless in the great hall.

The pistol cracked and the first pair were off, Rohrer of Seaton and Leyland of Hillbury. Neck and neck they ran to the first turn, where the Hillbury man got the inside and kept it for a whole lap, with Rohrer close at his heels and just out-

side. As they flashed by, Rob counted excitedly *one*, and followed them with his eyes as they swung round on the second circle. On the back stretch Rohrer tried to pass, but was crowded out at the turn and for the second time the pair swept by. This time Rohrer reached the curve even with his man, clung to him as he rounded the end, and once more on the back stretch drove himself to gain the inside at the turn. In his intense interest in the contest Rob had forgotten that his own labor was just about to begin; but Collins, faithful, watchful Collins, put him on his guard; and as the exhausted pair came straining in, like horses lashed across the finish line, Rob stood ready with yearning muscles and quivering nerves to touch hands with Rohrer and speed away. Rohrer gave him a lead of three good yards.

Could he keep this lead? For the first hundred yards, yes, or for a long stretch in which endurance was of equal value with speed; but for the intermediate distance, for the three hundred ninety yards which was the length of course he had to run with Kurtz, he had no confidence in his powers. One thing, however, he was determined on.

Whether Kurtz was ahead or behind, whether he was gaining or losing, he would run his stretch to the limit of his powers.

Around the first curve he was safe. On the back stretch Kurtz was gaining, — he knew it from the roars of the crowd, — but he still kept the pole at the second curve and crossed the starting line still ahead. Then Kurtz appeared at his elbow, passed by, swung into the curve just before him, gained on the back stretch, and passed the starting line at the end of the second lap ten yards ahead. Strong panted and quivered as he saw the distance grow, and Collins set his lips together and clenched his hands; but neither had a word of blame for the runner as he passed them on his last lap. "After him!" cried Collins. "Run it out!" screamed Strong. And Rob, hopeless but game to the end, dug his spikes into the track and drove himself steadily forward.

Yes, Kurtz was faster, but — not stronger. At the turn they were still ten yards apart, on the straightaway beyond but seven separated the contestants. Around the last curve Rob steadily

plodding gained three more on his weakening antagonist. When some seconds later, Strong, trembling with eagerness, touched his hand and darted away like a wild animal after its prey, Hillbury was but three yards ahead.

"I lost it!" gasped Rob, on Collins' shoulder.

"Not a bit of it!" retorted Collins. "You've done all I meant you to do. Kurtz was their best man. Look at Strong beat the stuffing out of that Hapgood!"

It was even so. Strong was trying Kurtz's trick of rushing by his antagonist with a burst of high speed, and trusting then to discouragement to keep the Hillbury man behind. When he crossed the starting line for the first time he had a lead of five yards; at the end of the second lap his margin was twelve. When Benton took up the race for the final heat, he was indebted to his captain for a ten yards' start.

And here, to the joy of the crowd and the fright of the Seatonians, came an unexpected development. Royce of Hillbury went at his task with startling vigor. On the first round he gained four yards, on the second three, on the back stretch

of the third he was close at Benton's elbow, but Benton still held the inside as they rounded the curve; and the yard lost on the outside run the plucky Hillburyite could not make up. He was still a yard in the rear when Benton breasted the tape at the finish line.

It was Rob's first and last race. Delighted yet regretful, trembling in every limb, and suddenly deprived of his strength like Samson under Delilah's shears, he dragged himself into the dressing rooms for his bath and rub down. Here he was congratulated and thanked by Lindsay and Durand and others of the thin cheering line. Here they brought him his prize, which he received with joy tempered with humility. If Strong and Rohrer had not done better than himself and Benton, the prizes would now be in other hands.

CHAPTER XII

AN INTERRUPTED EVENING

The lustre of the victory over Hillbury rested on the quartette about forty-eight hours. Had Royce got beyond Benton on that last curve, as he had almost succeeded in doing, and Seaton's portion been defeat instead of victory, there would have been a cloud over the school for a much longer period. Owen, having never felt the change in atmosphere which defeat brings, did not appreciate his escape. The victory seemed an unimportant matter, taken lightly, soon forgotten. The school looked up, smiled, and went about its daily routine. Rob put his prize in his desk drawer, and followed the school's example.

One of his unconfessed ambitions had been to win a prize for composition. Wolcott Lindsay had put the idea into his head, not by any direct suggestion, but by the respect with which he spoke of some of the fellows who had succeeded. Lindsay himself was on the *Seatonian*, but Owen

felt no ambition to enter into competition before his schoolmates for a position on that paper. The composition was comparatively secret. If he tried and failed, nobody need know the fact but the judges who read the compositions.

Owen's production on — let us not say what — was nearly ready to hand in. He had built no elaborate hopes upon it, but he would have liked sincerely to surprise his father with some achievement which Mr. Owen would value. Prowess in athletics was to Mr. Owen but superiority in play, often shared with the idle and the vicious. In scholarship Rob could never hope to rank above a low B; he had no gift for public speaking; no one ever urged him for office. In the composition, perhaps, he might win some place; it was at least worth trying.

He was busy with this effort one evening after the rest of his work was done, when his attention was suddenly distracted by a hubbub which arose at that end of the corridor where lay the abiding-place of the Pecks. He knew they were both on study hours, Donald having just been put on along with French and Jacobson, as the result

of a series of petty and apparently accidental annoyances in poor Mr. Payne's recitation room. It was hardly conceivable, therefore, that the twins would have attempted any noisy demonstration on their own initiative. Owen remembered the plagues, and hastened forth to have a part in the spectacle.

Others were also curious. He noticed, as he hurried past, that Payner's door was just ajar; and through the six-inch crack to which Smith cautiously limited the opening of his door, his lank, narrow-shouldered form was silhouetted against the light of the study lamp in the background, while curious eyes, doubly protected by glasses and a study shield, peered wonderingly forth.

Owen knocked at the Pecks' door, but received no response. Instead came the sound of blows struck with some hard object, of running, jumping feet, and of heated exclamations, some inarticulate, some distinct but mysterious, mingled in rapid exchange. "There he goes!" "Look out!" "I hit him then!" "Never touched him!" "Where is he?" Then more whacks,

more jumps, and more exclamations. Rob pushed the door open a few inches, and perceived a Peck armed with a golf club sweeping it beneath the sofa. The wielder of the club seemed to be successful in his search, for he jumped suddenly back, smote the floor savagely with the brassey, and catching sight of a face peering in through the crack, shouted to his twin: "Shut the door, can't you? Lock it!" A command which was obeyed so promptly that had Owen's nose been longer, or his disposition more pushing, he must inevitably have suffered personal injury. While he stood irresolute, uncertain whether to accept the indignity as deserved, or threaten reprisal, he heard steps ascending the stairs with labored celerity, and the face of Dr. Mann, swollen with indignation, appeared at the corner.

"Owen, what is the meaning of this disturbance?" the teacher demanded.

"I don't know, sir," replied Rob. "They seem to be hunting something in there."

Dr. Mann knocked, but as one of the inmates was at that moment thrashing wildly at an object in a corner, and the other was vociferating advice

and encouragement, naturally no heed was given to the summons.

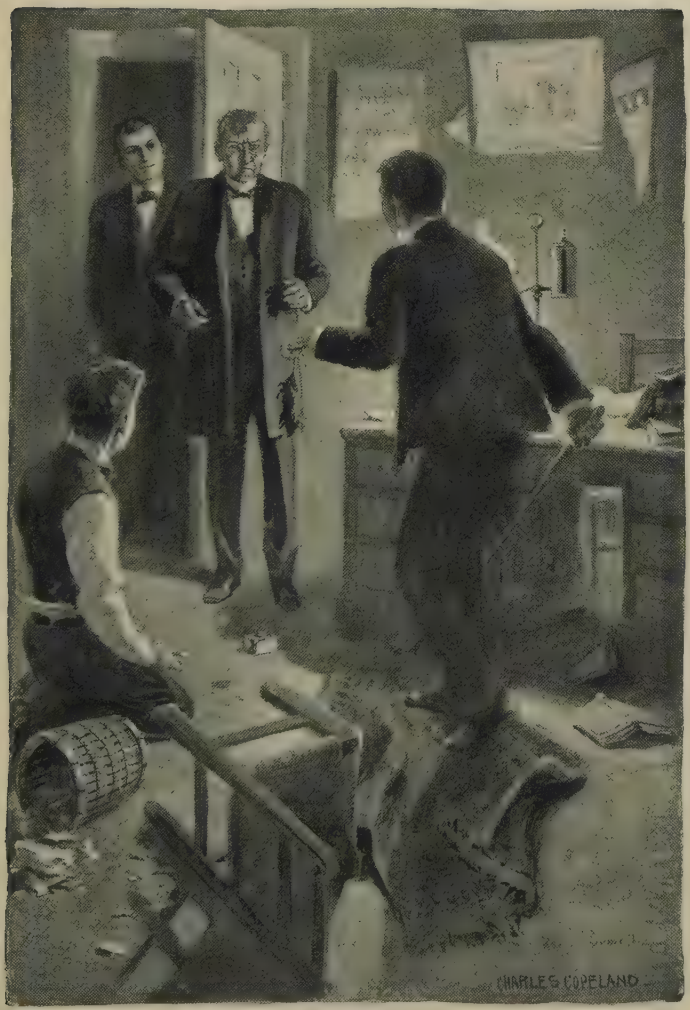
"Open the door!" commanded Dr. Mann. Still no answer. The noise of blows ceased. Favored by the lull, the teacher again lifted up a voice of sternness.

"It is I, Dr. Mann. I demand that you open the door instantly!"

At last he had made himself heard. "Coming, sir!" shouted one within, and the door was thrown open. Dr. Mann strode in, followed by Owen. Duncan was mopping up ink on the floor with a towel.

"Will you be good enough to explain this outrageous disturbance!" began the teacher. "Why is it that I am compelled to come up here to secure for my guests below the privilege of ordinary peace and quiet? And you are both on study hours!"

Rob turned abruptly away and grinned discreetly at the Indian's head over the fireplace. Those guests made the case doubly hard for the rioters. Dr. Mann could not allow his colleagues to suppose that he was accustomed to put up with



"THERE'S THE RAT, SIR," SAID DUNCAN.—*Page 127.*

such disorder. The ill-starred Pecks were evidently up against it!

"We're very sorry, sir, that you were disturbed," Donald was saying, "but it really wasn't our fault. Some one threw a live rat in at the door and we've been hunting it. We didn't mean to make any disturbance."

"Incredible!" exclaimed Dr. Mann.

"There's the rat, sir," said Duncan, holding up by the tail the unfortunate cause of all the trouble. "You can see it yourself."

Dr. Mann could see it. There was unquestionably a dead rat; and the ink spilled on the floor, the jar knocked from the mantel, the disordered furniture, scattered books, and the excited faces of the boys attested the fact that the poor animal had not been an expected guest.

"Who could have played such a contemptible trick!" exclaimed the teacher, in disgust. "Did you see who threw it in?"

"No, we were studying at the desk, and some one opened the door so quietly we didn't notice it, and chucked the thing right at us."

"Strange!" mused Dr. Mann. Strange, in-

deed! Yet after all not so strange to one who possessed the key. Rob held rolled in his hand a slip of paper which he had taken from the floor during the discussion. He glanced at it furtively as he stood listening, and smiled an involuntary and promptly extinguished smile as he read the expected legend, "The Third Plague." Even Dr. Mann might have formed a fairly accurate suspicion if he had considered the manner of the twins. Here was no wondering indignation, no loud invective against an unknown perpetrator, but the sullen bitterness of those who nourish a personal spite. But Dr. Mann, learned in ancient lore, had but slight knowledge of boys.

"I can't understand it," he said at length. "The matter must be looked into. It shows a sad misunderstanding of the Seaton spirit. One of you will please carry the animal to some proper place, and then perhaps we may have quiet again."

Duncan volunteered for this duty, and Dr. Mann and Owen retired. The latter reappeared, however, as soon as he heard Duncan's step on the stairs, in order to deliver the paper which he had secured.

"Oh, you had it!" exclaimed Duncan, as he read the label. "I thought it must be somewhere. Seven more! Gee whiz! I don't believe I can stand it."

"You'd better come to terms with him," said Owen.

"I wish we could," sighed Duncan, "but Don's got his back up and he will never give in. This living in perpetual fear of your life is wearing. I always pull my bed to pieces every night to make sure there isn't anything there, and I never can get it together tight again. Go and see him, won't you, and see what he says."

Owen grinned. The prospect of acting as intermediary pleased him. "All right," he said cheerfully. "What terms do you offer?"

"None," replied Duncan. "Just sound him and get his terms. And don't say we sent you."

Duncan returned to his room and Owen knocked at Payner's door.

"Who's there?" demanded the cautious inmate.

"Owen."

"Any one with you?"

"No."

The door was unlocked to admit Rob, the catch being immediately snapped behind him.

"'Fraid of burglars?" asked Rob, facetiously.

"'Fraid of something, sure enough," replied Payner, quietly. "You can't be any too careful in this place."

"Payner, how long are you going to keep this thing up?" asked Rob, coming with most undiplomatic directness straight to his point.

"What up?"

"Oh, all this plague business,—eels and guinea pigs and rats."

Payner snickered. "Did they send you?"

"No, they didn't. That is, not really and officially. I'm just making inquiries in the general interest of peace."

Payner sniffed. "What business is it of yours?"

Owen hesitated. "Oh, I'd like to help both sides. I don't want to see either suffer."

"I'm not suffering, I can tell you that. I didn't begin this thing, and I'm not going to cry

baby. Those fellows attacked me without any kind of provocation, sneaked into my room, ripped it up, and damaged a lot of valuable specimens. If they've had enough, the least they can do is to come here and apologize and promise to behave."

"And you'll agree to apologize, too?" asked the mediator.

"Apologize nothing! I'll tell 'em what I'll do, when they come."

Feeling somewhat humble over the failure of his mission, and at the same time more or less persuaded of the justice of Payner's cause, Owen returned to Number 7 and called the Pecks to the door.

"Apologize!" cried Donald, when Owen finished his report; "apologize for having eels put in your bed and rats thrown at you? Never!"

"We did begin it," observed Duncan, in a less violent tone.

"We didn't; he began it," returned Donald. "Didn't he butt in about the Moons' room?"

Owen turned away in annoyance. "Do as you please," he said, "but you're fools not to patch up with him some way."

Rob sat down at his desk, less disposed to find excuse for the Pecks than ever before. "It's that pig-headed Donald that causes the trouble," he was thinking. "Duncan would settle the thing right off, but he's scared of his brother;" and while his mind was rebelliously following the affairs of the Pecks, and refusing to apply itself on the composition, a knock was heard at the door, and the unfinished work was again shoved into a drawer out of sight.

"Hello, Ned!" cried Owen, looking up in surprise as Carle appeared. "Glad to see you," he added cordially; "sit down."

His first impression at sight of Carle's serious face was that the pitcher had reconsidered the interview of last week and come to make amends. Otherwise I am afraid his greeting would have been less cordial.

"Is your room-mate in?" Carle asked, looking toward the bedroom door.

"He's getting his Greek with a fellow downstairs. Do you want him?"

"No, I want you. Can you lend me twenty dollars?"

Rob knew that he had not twenty dollars on hand, or half that sum, but instead of saying so, he answered by a question: —

"What for?"

"I've got to have twenty to settle with a man before to-morrow morning. If I don't ante up he's going to see Graham, and I'll be fired sure."

"I'm short," said Owen, wondering what this trouble was about. "I might let you have five."

"That isn't enough," replied Carle, evidently disappointed, turning toward the door. "I've got to have twenty anyway. I'll try some one else. Good night."

And before Owen had time for further questions, the door closed behind his visitor, and Rob was left alone.

And now more time was wasted in considering Carle's case, and guessing at the cause of his urgent need. The composition at last came out, but not until Simmons had returned with his Greek books under his arm, and the lessons for the morning packed away in complete order in his little brain. Presently another knock was heard, and the literary work was definitely abandoned.

"Hello, Owen," said Poole, rushing in. "Can I see you a minute?"

Simmons obligingly retired to his bedroom, and Poole began:—

"I've just been talking with Mr. Lovering about Carle. He says the faculty are very much dissatisfied with him and he's very likely to lose his scholarship. I heard yesterday that he owed a lot of different fellows. What are we going to do about it?"

Owen shook his head. "I don't know. I can't do anything with him. His father wrote me last week, asking me to talk with Ned. I tried it, but it didn't amount to anything."

"But we must do something," persisted Poole. "A good pitcher is half the nine, and we haven't any one else within sight of him. I don't believe O'Connell will come to anything."

"But Patterson will," was on Owen's lips. He checked the words, however, before they were uttered, and said instead: "Carle was here just before you came in, trying to borrow some money. He said he must have twenty dollars before to-morrow morning. I couldn't lend him anything."

"Where did he go?"

"After some one who could get him the money."

"And he's on study hours. What a fool!" cried Poole, as he clapped on his hat and started for the door. "He acts as if he'd set his heart on getting fired. Good night!"

Owen echoed the salutation with emphasis, and got himself ready for bed. It was depressing to spend so much time on other people's affairs, and yet be of no apparent use. Then he bethought himself of Patterson, and felt better. There was one fellow who took his advice!

CHAPTER XIII

A WANING STAR

THE next morning, when Rob saw Carle swinging merrily off after chapel with a pair of irresponsible cronies, he judged that the twenty dollars had been found and the crisis averted. This was true. Unfortunately, however, the first successful effort, under spur of special necessity, to override the school decree as to study hours encouraged him to repeat the act of contempt a few days later. This time he made the most of the glamour of heroism attached by some boys to the reckless defier of authority. His triumph was short-lived. It is a peculiarity of this unsubstantial tribute of admiration that it is given, not for breaking the rules, but for daring to break them and for escaping unscathed. The maladroit who tries the heroic and is detected meets only contempt and derision. Carle was

detected and put on special probation — the last stage on the outward way.

It is not impossible for a boy, even at this dangerous point, to take a new grip and by steady pulling draw himself gradually back to a position of safety. This thought was Poole's only comfort, who now, desperately anxious for his pitcher, was ready to undergo any sacrifice if it would but avail to save his man. All forces possible were brought to bear on Carle himself and his surroundings. His friends were urged to try to stiffen him up. Mr. Graham's counsel and assistance were sought. The Principal gladly gave the encouragement to Poole that he would have given to any boy interested in steadying another in the right way; but at the same time he suggested that fellows whose moral energy needs to be bolstered up by extraneous means almost always prove a poor reliance on the athletic field. He did not say, as he might have done, that no amount of skill can make up for lack of grit and determination and honest effort; and that the sooner a trifler is disposed of, the less the ultimate disappointment will be. Poole, though himself

above reproach, was not ready for such a doctrine. He saw only that the nine must have a pitcher, and that Carle was a star who must be kept in school by all fair means. To all other considerations the captain was blind.

Owen, among the rest, was pressed into this crusade, though as Carle took very little notice of him, it was hard to see of what use he could be to the cause. In spite of his pity for Mr. Carle, he could not arouse himself to the desired pitch either of personal interest or of patriotic feeling. He knew Ned too well to cherish any delusion about his character; after four months of drifting in self-indulgence with the current, it was quite unlikely that Carle would have the strength to reverse his course and force his way inflexibly against it. And as for the school's need of a pitcher, Rob had, as we know, his own reason for regarding Carle as not indispensable.

So the last fortnight of the winter term crept by, with Carle under watch and ward to prevent critical offence. He was coached in his lessons, guarded from undesirable visitors, showered abundantly with moral advice, earnestly admon-

ished of his loyal obligations to the school. Flattering as this distinction was, it had its unpleasant side. In the first place Carle had to work — and work had become for him the least attractive way of spending his time. Secondly, a dreary prospect stretched before him: he must continue to work like a man pumping for his life; for if he slackened pace or relapsed into his old habits, special probation became immediately "severed connection." Thirdly, there was no fun in it, and no likelihood of fun. His disgust with the position grew more intense as the days dragged painfully along.

The events of these days which especially concern this narrative may be briefly enumerated.

Another plague visited the Pecks. Number four was chemical, not zoölogical in its character, and while its effect lasted it seemed more severe than any of its predecessors. If you wish to know what it was like, — I advise strongly against the experiment, — pour two ounces of sulphuretted hydrogen into an open dish in a closed room. As Duncan reported sadly to Owen the next day, "It smelt like the concentrated essence of rotten eggs, as if a whole car-load of 'em had been stewed

down into a spoonful." After this Duncan openly declared for peace, but Donald hardened his heart. Owen, once more appealed to, approached Payner again, but the avenger was obdurate. He would not take the apology of one for both, and he would not undertake to distinguish between two indistinguishables; they were both bad until both were good.

The names of the prize winners in composition were read aloud in chapel. Two were awarded prizes and one received honorable mention. When Mr. Graham announced that he was about to read the names, Rob felt a thrill of sudden emotion, and, dropping his eyes like a timid girl abashed at public praise, listened expectant, half convinced that the next moment the glances of his neighbors would be aimed at him. And when the names of the fortunate were read, with no Robert Owen among them, and the applause burst forth about him, he kept his gaze still fixed upon the floor, penetrated through and through with shame at his presumption. In a moment, however, he held up his head and joined in the

THE CHAPEL STAIRS.

clapping with a vehemence that added a second or two to its length. Why should he care? He had as much right to try for the prize as any one. Nobody knew he had tried anyway, except Simmons, and Simmons would keep quiet.

So Rob jostled his way downstairs with the crowd, and strove to think no more of his disappointment. It kept recurring, however, in heavy moments during the Greek recitation, and once he was almost caught napping by a stray question as he dwelt longingly on the satisfaction he might have had in making the announcement to his father. A prize for an essay would have been an antidote for a whole season of parental objections to baseball!

That morning was blue all through. Simmons's well-meant commiseration buried him still deeper in the dumps. He brooded in unreasonable discouragement over the fancied failures of the year. The relay prize, his only success, had come to him in defeat through the efforts of another. In baseball he was to be numbered among the substitutes; his scholarship was mediocre; he possessed none of the qualities which bring popu-

larity. Then he bethought himself of Carle, and the dangers of popularity and success as exemplified in the career of that youth, and felt some comfort. Mediocrity was at least safe.

Meanwhile Carle was losing interest in the cause. He was often sullen, and gave small and sometimes ungracious coöperation to those who were trying to help him. The glories of school life were no less attractive to him; he was as ambitious as ever to be the shining light of the baseball season, but the seriousness of the obstacles was growing clearer. To turn square about, work hard, shun extravagant friends, husband the pennies, do without every luxury, — this was his prospective life if he held on at Seaton. Was it worth while, even for the sake of the baseball? Carle, who was possessed of nothing resembling Spartan fortitude, had his doubts.

During the last week a further change set in. He became secretive where he had been confidential, and shy where he had formerly courted attention. He received important letters from his father without giving a hint of their contents; he had two interviews with the Principal, as to

which the baseball people could get no information. A dealer in second-hand furniture called on him by appointment when his room-mate was absent. He cashed a check and paid certain bills.

The school broke up for the short spring recess on Tuesday morning early enough to permit those fortunate ones who lived at accessible points to catch the eleven o'clock train out of town. The candidates for the nine remained behind to take advantage of the recess for practice. Comans, Carle's room-mate, who lived in Massachusetts, got off on the first train. In the afternoon Carle had his usual practice with Borland.

On Wednesday the first mail brought to Robert Owen a letter from one of his correspondents in Terryville, which contained one short passage more interesting than all the rest: "They say Ned Carle is coming home to stay. His father says he's disappointed in the school; it's too expensive and they don't make the boys work as they ought to."

Could it be true? Was Carle really going to leave? The baseball crowd surely knew nothing of any such plan.

Rob jammed his hat on his head and hurried over to Carter 13. The door was locked; his knocks roused only hollow echoes. He ran downstairs and stampeded across the yard. At the gate he met Poole.

"I was coming to see you," Rob began eagerly. "I've just had a letter from a friend of mine at home. There's something in it that'll interest you." He read the passage aloud. "What do you think of that?" he asked, lifting his eyes in serious question to the captain's face.

"Rot!" exclaimed Poole, contemptuously. "I don't believe a word of it. Why, he was pitching to Borland yesterday afternoon!"

"But I couldn't raise him this morning," said Rob, his eagerness somewhat chilled.

"Oh, he wouldn't sneak off like that without a peep. Let's hunt him up and see what he says about it."

They crossed the yard in silence and ascended the stairs in Carter; Rob ashamed of his credulity, Poole clinging to his assurance, yet secretly agitated at the frightful possibility. As they neared Room 13, Poole, who was ahead, perceived

that the door was ajar, and turned about with a triumphant smile.

"It's all right; he's here," he called, giving a whack at the door that opened it wide.

But inside stood revealed, not Carle, but Jenks, the second-hand furniture man. The visitors gaped at him for a moment in speechless astonishment.

"Where's Carle?" demanded Poole, recovering himself.

"On his way home, I expect. He was going by the early train this morning."

Rob threw at his companion a significant glance, but Poole was gazing at the speaker with staring eyes and open mouth.

"Has he sold his things to you?" asked Rob.

"All he didn't take with him. He arranged with me to call for 'em this morning. He ain't coming back, you know."

CHAPTER XIV

A CAPTAIN'S TROUBLES

Poole stood in the middle of the room, his lips still parted, his eyes staring. His expression, as Owen saw it, and as it would have appeared if reproduced by instantaneous photography, was almost idiotic, so stunned was he by the incredible news. In a moment, however, intelligence returned.

"Do you mean to say that Carle has sneaked off home for good, and sold his things to you?" he demanded fiercely, taking a threatening step forward upon poor Jenks, as if the dealer were to be held responsible for Carle's disappearance.

Mr. Jenks edged away. "I dunno about sneakin'," he replied resentfully; "I said he'd gone home for good and sold his things to me. I s'pose he's got a right to go if he wants to."

"Did he tell you he wasn't coming back?"

"Yes, he did, three days ago, right in this very

room. He didn't want me to come for the stuff till to-day, because he said the boys would bother him with questions. I'm going to send him the money as soon as I get the things down to the store."

Poole stood silent, but his eyes, angrily snapping, remained fixed upon the furniture dealer, and his lips, tightly shut, twitched at the corners. Mr. Jenks looked puzzled; suddenly a ray of intelligence flashed over his face. "None of the furniture was yours, was it?" he asked eagerly, thinking to have found the reason for Poole's emotion. "He said it was all his, except what belonged to his room-mate."

"None of it's mine," returned Poole, turning abruptly on his heel. "Come on, Owen!"

He went plunging down the stairs, with Owen following closely. At the outside door he turned on his companion.

"What do you think of that?" he demanded hotly. "That's a fine trick to play us, isn't it!"

"If his father sent for him I suppose he had to go," remarked Owen, thinking for the moment

rather of Mr. Carle's plight than of that of the school.

"Why did he have to go?" shouted Poole, whose wrath, already at the boiling-point, bubbled furiously over at the suggestion of excuse for Carle's defection. "Why did he have to go? Why couldn't he stay here and earn his way as well as Laughlin and Jeffrey and White and Barrington, and lots of other fellows that are better than he is? Why did he have to join that Standard Oil crowd and play the sport, when he knew, and everybody knew, that he had no money to spend? Why couldn't he live within his means, like any decent fellow? Think of his knowing for a week that he was going to clear out, and letting us tend him and tutor him and guard him like a confounded little prince! Why, he was in the cage with Borland yesterday afternoon!"

These were obviously rhetorical questions, to which answers were not expected. But Rob, though he felt no temptation to undertake the defence of Carle, could not refrain from remarking: "You fellows were partly responsible.

You've done nothing but flatter him and pet him since he came."

There was some truth in this charge, and Poole was honest enough to recognize it. He passed abruptly from vituperation to lament: —

"But he could pitch — you know he could. I never saw a fellow in the cage like him — and he's let us waste all the winter on him, the beggar, and now crawls off just when we rely on him most. What's O'Connell or that green Patterson compared with him? Borland's simply thrown his winter away."

The references to Patterson and Borland were not pleasing to Owen; the first, because he knew that the contemptuous opinion was not deserved, the second, because it emphasized once more the contrast between his own position and that of Borland. It had apparently not occurred to Poole that Patterson might have developed under Owen's tuition.

"I call Patterson a very promising man," he blurted out, stung by the captain's slur, and regardless of his secret.

Poole shot a quick glance at his companion.

"Better than Carle, perhaps," he said with a mocking smile.

"Better than Carle two years from now, if not better to-day," Owen retorted hotly. "I've caught them both and I ought to know something about it."

Poole sniffed, — in pity rather than contempt. That a fellow who evidently had seen good ball, and who usually showed common sense, should group Carle and Patterson together as equals, or likely to be equals, seemed unaccountable. "He'll do me a heap of good two years from now, won't he? I want some one for now." And then, after a few moments of silence, during which he kicked away at the marble entrance step, while his thoughts dwelt gloomily on the desperate situation, he added in discouraged tones: "I suppose the first thing to do is to ask Grim whether the chap has really gone for good, though I haven't any doubt about it myself."

So they parted, Poole to visit the Principal and receive confirmation of Jenks's story, Owen to return to his room and upbraid himself for boasting about Patterson. He felt all the con-

THE PRINCIPAL'S HOUSE.

fidence in his protégé that his words implied, but he had no desire to see his pitcher taken from his hands and turned over to Borland as Carle had been. When Patterson was tried out he wanted to be on hand to support him and keep him up to his best; likewise to receive a just share of the glory of the achievement, should the achievement prove glorious — but of this he tried not to think.

Borland's task during the short spring recess was not what he had imagined it when he had said good-by to his admiring friends, sharing sincerely in their belief that he was to constitute at least one-half of the best battery that the school had ever possessed. Instead, he found himself doomed to partake of the disgrace of O'Connell's failures. And alas! it was the same old O'Connell, conceited, obstinate, uncertain as a primitive blunderbuss! He did indeed take seriously the new responsibility devolving upon him through the departure of Carle; he really meant to do everything within his power to "make good." He laid aside the airs of superiority and self-satisfaction which had been so offensive to Owen; he was not unwilling

to consider Borland's advice; he endeavored to keep his inflammable temper well shielded from stray sparks. Unfortunately, however, he was not by nature teachable, nor was Borland a wise instructor. When two drops in succession landed on the plate, Borland would protest and O'Connell promise to do better. When, a little later, O'Connell would persist in shooting his high ones at the batsman's head, or throwing ridiculous outs that showed themselves clearly wide long before they came within reach of the bat, Borland would reprove sharply, O'Connell retort with asperity, Borland sputter and growl, O'Connell drop all fire protection and let his temper blaze away! Whether peace was patched up immediately or not, that day's practice was ruined.

To say that the captain was discouraged would be an understatement of poor Poole's condition. He was desperate. Laughlin cheered him somewhat by assuring him on general principles that the opportunity usually produces the man, and so some one would probably be found to fill Carle's place, if not better than the renegade, at least as good. But Laughlin knew nothing of

baseball, and Poole had little faith in general principles. He took the first chance that offered to watch Patterson and Owen at their practice, hoping to find substantial reason for Owen's assurance. But Owen, obstinately true to his purpose never to show off his man, kept Patterson working away on the morning's task, — a slow ball which was to be thrown with the exact motions used in throwing a swift one, but about ten feet slower, — and disregarded the spectator. The captain had at last to ask for something different, and was of course obeyed. Though what he saw would hardly represent Patterson's possibilities as a pitcher, Poole left the cage with the feeling that Patterson was, after all, not so bad.

"Ten feet slower!" he said to himself as he strolled back to his room. "That's drawing things pretty fine! If it's too slow it's bad, of course, for a man gets ready to hit, stops himself, makes a fresh start, and very likely catches it squarely and drives it out. It's got to be slower than a swift one, and not too slow; but how does Owen know that the difference is just ten feet? The chap understands handling a pitched ball all

right, and Patterson minds him as a Japanese soldier minds his officer, but I don't believe that he's so mighty wise that he knows the difference to a foot between a swift ball and a slow one."

Poole resolved to see the whole of the next pitching practice. But, unhappily, Patterson was called home the next day because his family were unwilling to forego the pleasure of his society during the few days of liberty that the school offered, — so there was no practice to watch except that of O'Connell and Borland, who quarrelled daily, and daily made up under the pressure of their joint responsibility, each blaming the other for lack of progress. It was not pure joy to be captain of the Seaton nine!

CHAPTER XV

OUTDOORS AT LAST

THE boys came rushing back for the final lap of the school year. Already on the train most of them had heard the startling news: "Carle isn't going to pitch! Carle has left school!" These brief statements of undeniable truth were not all they heard; there were additions through wild rumors and bold surmises transformed to positive facts in the repeating: Carle left because he wasn't allowed to play ball; Carle was proved a professional and had to go; Carle was fired because he left town without permission, because he cut chapel too often, because he didn't do any work, because he had a row with a teacher, because he was a scholarship man and smoked, because he had been drinking, because he played poker. For two whole days Owen was kept busy denying these rumors. Then the tongues gradually ceased to wag; and Carle faded in-

gloriously away into the limbo of the suddenly departed, whose names when mentioned in the *Seatonian* always bear the significant "ex" before the numeral of the class which once claimed them.

With the returning boys, to Poole's great relief, came the baseball coach, Mr. Lyford. The ground on the upper campus was already hard enough for practice; the regular diamond was drying. Cutting though the winds and raw and chill the atmosphere, Rob yet found it an immense relief to escape from the confining walls of the little cage into the open, where there was room to throw, and honest, abundant daylight. He had never taken kindly to the practice in the cage. When he tried to bat there, he had always been awkwardly conscious of those close lines of netted wall pressing upon him, of the low ceiling, of the treacherous shadows, of the impossibility of driving the ball anywhere, of the whole sham of the situation compared with the open field, where the sunlight pours down through fifty miles of atmosphere, and the wide horizon challenges the batsman to his hardest drive. Perhaps this

feeling was responsible for his lack of success as a cage batsman; perhaps he hated the cage because he couldn't hit there. At any rate, the facts were connected, and he welcomed his release with the heartiness of the landlubber when, after his first voyage, he exchanges the narrow, malodorous, unsteady forecastle for solid, familiar earth.

Not so poor Patterson. He felt as a timid pupil would if snatched suddenly from a gentle tutor's care and thrust into a lively school, where independence must be fought for and honors won unaided. His courage failed him; he dreaded to go forth into public view and face the test, with eager batters trying for real base hits, and every error of judgment or delivery counting in the score. The cage was familiar ground to Patterson. Here he had acquired whatever skill he possessed. With Owen behind the plate to explain just what to throw and how to throw it, with no one else at hand to molest or make afraid, he could handle the ball as well as another. His wrist had the master snap that yields sharp curves; his shoulder the sweeping swing that makes speed.

But outside — alas! outside was a strange land in which he feared to trust himself.

"Foolishness!" laughed Owen, when Patterson frankly confided to him these misgivings. "You'll do better outside. There's all the inspiration of the game to spur you on, and the fun of working your man, — putting your wits against his, you know, and making him do things he doesn't want to do."

"But I don't feel as if I had any wits," said Patterson, "or shouldn't have any if I got into a close, hard game."

Owen stopped short in his walk and fixed his eyes disapprovingly on his companion's face. "Look here, Pat," he said sternly, "you've got to cut that kind of talk and that kind of thinking too. We're going out to play ball, not to help fight a battle or swim for our lives or anything like that, but just play ball. There's absolutely nothing to worry about; we aren't the captain or the coach. We'll do as well as we can, and if our best is good enough, we'll make the nine. If we don't make it, it'll be because there are others better, and we shan't have any responsibility.

So there's nothing to worry about in either case. But if you're all the time scared that you'll do something wrong, you'll never do anything right. That's as sure as the multiplication table."

Patterson did not answer.

"Isn't that good sense?" demanded Owen.

Patterson drew a long breath. "It's good sense all right, but I don't know whether I can do it."

Owen snorted. "You can if you've a mind to. Just settle it that you'll do your best and be satisfied with whatever turns up. Why can't you let Poole and Lyford do the worrying?"

"I suppose I can," said Patterson, humbly.

"I should hope you could! I tell you, man, you've got the goods! You have speed and good control and all the curves you need. If you give yourself half a chance they'll recognize it. If they don't, what do you care? There are other teams in the country, and this isn't the only year you're going to play. Just stop thinking, and play your game, and be satisfied if you make the second!"

"That's all I expect to do," answered Patterson,

nettled. He felt for the moment angry with himself and vexed with Owen, but the talk did him good. He faced the first practice with an outward show of composure that did very good duty for confidence.

The coach made no significant comment on the batteries. He had kept in touch with the work of the winter through Poole's letters, and doubtless shared the captain's view that with Carle eliminated from the list, O'Connell must be the chief reliance of the season. At all events, on the first rally of forces in the open, he spent most of his time on Borland and his mate. O'Connell did better than usual, having got at least this measure of good from Borland's browbeating, that he was more cautious in his delivery, and made better aim for the plate.

Owen exerted himself on the occasion to put his pitcher through his paces, and give the coach some inkling of what he fondly believed to be Patterson's great promise. But unfortunately, either from the novelty of the new conditions or from nervousness, the pitcher was slow in steadying down; and by the time he was delivering the

balls as the catcher expected, Poole called Owen away to join the outfielders, who were catching flies, and put Foxcroft in his place. And Foxcroft blighted the pitcher's inspiration as a hoarfrost blights a hothouse plant.

"How did it go?" asked Owen, coming in some time later for a brief batting practice before the net.

Patterson gave a doleful shake of the head. "To pieces," he answered laconically. "I never could pitch to that fellow!"

"What did Lyford say?"

"Nothing. He didn't need to say anything."

"Owen!" called Poole, and Rob, picking up his bat, took the place before the net which Peacock had just vacated. He felt disappointed and irritated; disappointed because, having made Patterson's cause his own, he was himself hurt by the failure; irritated because he was sure that if Poole had only left him alone another ten minutes he could have pulled his friend safely through. He stood at the plate with his jaw set, and his eyes shining bright, ready to hit and hit hard. O'Connell was pitching for the batsmen, and O'Connell

asked nothing better than the privilege of striking out this arrogant freshie, who had presumed to offer instruction to him in the cage, and had dropped him so contemptuously for not receiving it. So he tried a deceiver in the shape of a hot outcurve — O'Connell's strongest card — which starts wide and swings over the plate. Owen felt savage, but not savage enough to lose his wits. He had learned long since from McLennan that the great batsmen study the pitcher's motive and try to guess in advance the ball that he will pitch. Knowing O'Connell's strong and weak points, he had no difficulty in recognizing the ball that came spinning threateningly toward him. So he waited unmoved, and swung at it as it broke over the plate as if the ball itself were the animate cause of his disappointment.

Bat and ball met squarely with a crash; the ball sped away, not in a high parabola that gives the lazy outfielder an easy put out, nor in the regular sharp bounds which a clever baseman may handle, but well above the reach of any infielder, and striking the ground too soon and with too hot a pace to be held by the outfield. A hard

hit like this, if it passes between the outfielders on a deep, smooth field, rolls forever.

"A bully hit!" exclaimed Durand, as Owen, his frown transformed into a smirk of satisfaction, took his place with the rest. "That's good for three bases sure."

"I don't know about that," Owen replied modestly, mentally resolving, however, that if he ever made such a hit in a real game he wouldn't stop to look round till he had passed third.

"Too hard," was the comment of the coach to Poole, "but good form."

"I'm hoping to get a good hitting outfielder out of him," replied Poole. "Carle told me Owen's batting average was always high. I suppose Borland will do all our catching."

Patterson came up for his trial. O'Connell, angry with himself for having let Owen get a long drive out of him, set himself to fool the pitcher at least.

"Don't try for big hits!" warned the coach. "Just watch the ball and make sure you hit it. Wait for the good ones!"

And Patterson watched the ball and waited,

letting the good ones go by and striking at the poor ones. He finally succeeded in poking a feeble bounder over to the pitcher's position, and thus obtained the privilege of retiring. Altogether Patterson's first day out gave little promise that his ambitions would ever be realized.

CHAPTER XVI

THEORIES AND PLANS

"Going to get into the game to-day?" asked Wolcott Lindsay, on the Saturday morning following the first outdoor practice, as he met Owen coming out of the Pecks' room. "I understand they've got about twenty men on the batting list."

Rob laughed constrainedly. "Yes, Sudbury and Tom Riley and I are all going to play centre field."

"I thought you were down for second base."

Rob shook his head. "They tried me there yesterday, but I didn't make good, so I've gone further out."

"Well, I hope you'll make good there. Durand says you're a slugger."

"I'm not!" answered Rob, sharply. He had his own opinions as to men who are always trying

for home runs. "I'm no great fielder either," he added more moderately, "as you'll see if you come up. Who are these Seaton Clippers anyway?"

"Oh, just a team made up of townies. We always play the opening game with the Clippers to try out the men."

They parted, Rob going into his room, where Simmons sat in the corner of the window-seat, doubled up over a book.

"Poole's been here to see you," said Simmons, looking up. "He says the Clippers have gone back on him — they couldn't get their pitcher — so he's going to have a five-inning game between two nines. He wants you and Patterson as battery for the second. Game starts at three. You're to be up there as soon after two as possible for preliminary practice. I told him I'd tell you."

Simmons recited his message as he would a well-studied theorem in geometry, and, having recited it, buried himself again in his book. He was a most accurate little person, — tiresomely accurate, Rob sometimes thought. On this occasion, however, Rob's face lighted up at his room-

mate's words; and though he opened his mouth to ask a question, he closed it immediately with the question unasked. The message was complete. It was also welcome; if he had planned an arrangement that would give Pat the best chance to show his powers it couldn't have been better. And now the opportunity had come unsought! If they did well, the credit was wholly theirs; if they failed, no hopes would be disappointed but their own.

"I'm going over to see Pat," he said, clapping on his hat again. There were some uncertainties about signals which must be cleared up before the afternoon. Then a new thought came to him, and he dropped into a chair by his desk to jot down several memoranda on a blank sheet. When he looked up, he found Simmons's eyes fixed upon him with the discouraged expression which sometimes haunted them, particularly after a visit home. Simmons was a most conscientious student, an excellent scholar in languages, and personally quite unassuming and inoffensive. But he was not strong physically, and in occasional times of weakness or weariness was likely to dwell

morbidly on the contrast between his own situation and that of his more robust, lively, and popular associates. Rob understood at a glance that this was one of Simmons's homesick days, so he tucked his notes away in his pocket and turned to his apathetic little chum.

"Going to the game?" he asked in a hearty tone.

"No," replied Simmons, dropping his eyes again to the page before him. "I don't care anything about baseball."

"Why don't you go up the river, then? You ought to be outdoors somewhere on a day like this."

"I'd rather stay here. Payner asked me to go up with him, but I don't think I should enjoy his society."

"Payner!" exclaimed Owen, staring at his companion with an interest no longer forced. Then he threw back his head and laughed aloud.

Simmons put down his book. "I don't see anything so funny in that. Why shouldn't he invite me if he wants to?"

"He should, and if I were invited I'd go, if I had to cut ball practice to do it."

Simmons looked his astonishment, but said nothing.

"You might find out where he gets the things that he bestows on the Pecks," continued Owen.

"Have they had another?" cried Simmons, eagerly, jumping to his feet and planting himself in front of Owen. "Tell me, have they had another? What was it?"

Owen grinned and nodded. "Some queer little olive-green lizards, about three inches long, with small red spots all over them. I didn't know the things."

"How did it come? They've kept their door locked for a long time, and they hardly dare open a window."

"In the laundry bag," chuckled Owen. "It was left outside their door, and the lizards just went to sleep in it. There was the usual ticket tied to one of their tails, 'The Fifth Plague.'"

"I don't think that's so awfully bad," said

Simmons, after some reflection. "A lizard wouldn't scare me much."

"That's what Don said," replied Rob, smiling as he recalled the scene. "He thought it showed Payner was about at the end of his resources. But Duncan said the season was just opening, and half the plagues were yet to come, always supposing that Payner would be content with the biblical number. When I left them they were still arguing — well, I've got to get over to see Patterson."

Owen took up his hat again. Simmons was standing by the window. The boy turned around as Owen approached the door, and said apologetically: "I think I'll go in and tell Payner I've changed my mind. I may as well go with him after all."

"That's right!" called Owen, from the door. "And be sure you tell me all about it."

And he ran downstairs with a light heart, eager to see Patterson and plan the signal service for the afternoon.

Half an hour afterward he was still sitting at one side of Patterson's table, with the pitcher

on the other and the notes between them. The conversation, however, was no longer concerned with signals.

"I tell you it's so," Owen was declaring. "One of the first two balls pitched has got to be put over. If not, you're in a hole."

"I don't see that," said Patterson.

"Well, I can prove it to you," said Owen, confidently. "Look here, now. When you start in with a batter, the chances are four to three in favor of the pitcher, aren't they? He has four balls to give away, and the batter has three chances to strike. Really the odds in favor of the pitcher are much greater, because even if you give the batter a ball that he can hit, there are eight men lying in wait for it, and one of 'em is likely to get it."

Patterson nodded.

"Now, as long as you can keep the batter uncertain whether the ball that's coming is good or bad, you have him at a disadvantage, haven't you? But when you're so fixed that you must put 'em over, he's got you at a disadvantage."

"I can see that," said Patterson.

"Well, if you give two balls right off, you've changed the chances from four to three in your favor, to three to two in his; and he feels pretty certain that the next one will be over, because you've got to begin to get strikes. After that, if you get a single ball, you must put every one over, and the batter knows it. So to get two balls at the start is to put yourself in a hole."

"Then the first ball to pitch to a man is either one that he'll strike at, thinking it's a good one, or a really good one that he can't hit, or doesn't think of offering at."

"That's the theory," said Owen. "As a matter of fact, most of these fellows couldn't hit a straight ball more than half the time, if you told them where it was coming. McLennan says you can fool most amateurs with speed alone. He's coached college teams and ought to know."

"And if you can get two strikes on him early, you have him worrying," mused Patterson.

"Yes, but it won't do to let 'em think that's your only method. The idea is, never get into a position where you've *got* to give a strike. Always keep them guessing."

Rob batted to the infield of the Second nine before the game, and came to the conclusion that Patterson would receive little help from the men behind him. At second base was a short, round, red-headed lad rejoicing in the name of McGuffy, who fumbled every other grounder, as if alternation were a rule of the game. At short played another fatty, most inaptly named Smart, who always threw either over the first baseman's head or at one side of his feet, and seemed quite ignorant of the very elementary rule that shortstop covers second on hits to the pitcher's left. Peacock at third combined the faults of his two neighbors. The one redeeming feature in the near landscape was Ames, the tall, raw-boned, awkward junior who crouched on his long legs like a grasshopper at first base, and flung out his big hands to incredible distances for the poor throws served up to him by the trio of incompetents around the diamond. Rob grinned with amusement as he watched the fellow gathering in the balls, hopelessly clumsy and inelegant from finger ends to tips of toes. The spectators on the benches laughed and jeered, until Poole shut

them up by a peremptory message. Long Ames paid no attention to them; he was too busy scooping Peacock's short bounds out of the dust, and pulling down high sailers that Smart had started on their way to the bleachers.

Allis at left field was made captain of the Second. It was he who arranged the batting order, at the head of which Owen was placed, evidently on account of his success at the net during the two days of outdoor practice. Allis himself came next, then Rorbach, then Reddy McGuffy and his antipode Ames. Poole took his team into the field, and Rob faced O'Connell for the first test of strength. Were he and Patterson to prove in a class with McGuffy and Peacock? A few innings would show.

CHAPTER XVII

A SET-BACK FOR O'CONNELL

ABSORBED as he was in one phase of the game, — the success of the second battery, — Rob felt no anxiety at all as to his own personal record with the bat. He wanted to hit O'Connell, of course, but the chief thing after all was that Patterson should not be hit. So he stood coolly at the plate, ready for anything that O'Connell might send in, but unworried and more than half expecting to get his base on balls. The first one was high, the second he had to dodge, the third was a called strike, the fourth a drop that dropped too far, the fifth an unmanageable in, that hit him in the small of the back as he squirmed away from it, and gave him the desirable gift of first base and the undesirable one of a painful bruise.

Allis strode up, pounded the plate with his bat, and squared himself, with legs apart, for a mighty deed. While Rob knew nothing of Allis's powers,

he did not like this form; and not wishing to be cut off at second by an infield hit, he determined to make a dash at the first pitch, when a steal would hardly be expected. So off he scampered at the first movement of O'Connell's arm, and covered his distance so well in spite of his bruise that when he slid safely to the bag, McPherson was in the air taking Borland's high throw. In other respects also the venture proved a lucky one, for Allis hit two fouls and then struck out, and Rorbach made a scratch hit to short that would certainly have cut Owen off at second if he had clung to first base. As it was, Rorbach was safe at first, and Rob reached third before the ball got back across the diamond. Then Reddy McGuffy sent up a little pop fly to the first baseman, and long Ames appeared beside the plate, swinging his bat like an axe.

The lads on the seats made merry as Ames smote terribly and in vain at the first one over. The next he let go by; it was a ball. At the third he smote again, this time with effect. The ball shot out over first baseman's head, bounced hard on the running track, and made full speed for the corner of the field.

Then for some seconds the onlookers saw lively running. Peters in right field sprinted for the ball, the second baseman ran out to support him, Rob trotted home, Rorbach fled along two bags behind him, and still farther behind came Ames, galloping like a cart horse and constantly twisting his head backward to make sure that the ball was not close at hand. The fellows who had been jeering were now stamping and yelling, the players of the Second were running up and down the lines, brandishing their arms and shouting contradictory directions. Ames rounded third base at full speed, saw the ball bounce into Borland's hands, stopped, turned, — and was touched ignominiously out by Durand two feet from third. And then the spectators hooted and jeered more violently than ever.

"If it keeps up like this, there'll be more fun than practice," thought Rob, as he buckled on his protector. And to Patterson, as the latter started for the box, he said: "Don't worry about the bases; I'll throw to them when it's necessary. Just try your hardest to put 'em where I want 'em, and don't worry. If a batter's slow or timid,

give him full speed. And don't think because one happens to hit you they all will."

McPherson led off for the First nine. Patterson fixed the ball in his two fingers and drove it hard and straight over the inner corner of the plate just below the shoulder line. It struck with a resounding clap in Owen's big mitt, and as it struck, McPherson realized that he had lost a chance. As the next one looked exactly like the first, McPherson whacked valiantly at it, but just before it reached the plate the ball broke and lifted, while the bat swept the air beneath it. Two strikes!

"It's all his way now," thought McPherson. "This'll be a ball," — and it would have been if it had kept its first course. Unfortunately for the batsman, however, it slanted down and in instead of down and out, and the umpire called it a strike.

"Astonishing how a man loses his batting eye during the winter!" thought Poole, as he took McPherson's place at the plate. "If I can't hit that fellow I must be blind."

Now the captain was considered the best batter

in school, and deservedly so. In the fatal Hillbury game of the year before he had proved almost the only Seaton man whom the Hillbury pitcher could not deceive, and he and McPherson were responsible for all the hits the defeated team had made. He had an excellent eye, watched the ball closely, and was a patient waiter. All this Owen knew. He also knew that a waist ball was the kind Poole always longed for, that he was wary on high ones, and often hit a low one in a long fly. Patterson's first attempt was clearly wide of the plate; his second was low. Poole offered at neither, and both were called balls. By the next ball, the same full-speed straight one which had fooled McPherson, Poole was caught napping, and the sharp "Strike one!" of the umpire gave comfort to both members of the battery. Rob now signalled for the slow ball, at which Poole struck too soon. With two balls and two strikes, Patterson put a low one over the outside of the plate, hoping to finish with the captain immediately; but Poole caught it on the end of his bat and sent it in a long arch to centre field, where Rorbach gathered it in. Sudbury, who came next,

struck at the first pitched ball and raised a pop fly, which the second baseman, to Owen's surprise and McGuffy's own immense satisfaction, managed to hold. Reddy tossed the ball over to the pitcher's box with the best air of a professional, and strutted complacently in. The first inning had ended with the score two to nothing in favor of the scrub.

O'Connell pitched six times to strike out Smart. Meanwhile, Owen and Patterson discussed the situation.

"Great luck, wasn't it!" began the pitcher, eagerly.

"The greatest luck was that McGuffy held that fly," Rob answered with more coolness. With all his interest in the trying-out process, habit and experience kept him philosophical. "I didn't believe he'd do it."

"He may be better than he looks," said Patterson.

Rob had no answer for this. "How's your arm?" he said.

"All right. I can give you a little more speed if you want it."

"We shall have to be careful about Durand. The rest ought to be easy."

Smart returned to the bench, having surrendered his place at the bat to Peacock. Owen took a seat beside McGuffy. "You understand that you are to cover second if a man on first tries to steal, don't you?"

"Of course!" answered McGuffy, indignantly.

"I simply want to avoid a misunderstanding," retorted Owen. "I don't care to throw to centre field."

Peacock hit to Hayes, the shortstop, and was thrown out. Fletcher reached first base on balls, but was left there when Patterson sent a fly to Durand. The First team came in to bat once more.

Patterson put the first one over, and Durand met it, driving a grounder to Smart. The shortstop fumbled, and then, when it was too late to catch the fleet runner, threw wide and low to first. How Ames managed to get his mitt on the ball was hard to understand, but the mitt was there and the ball stopped. A new batsman came up, Peters, the right fielder; and Rob, glancing at the

pair at first base, made up his mind that Durand was going to steal. So he signalled for a high out, and Peters whacked at it, though it was beyond his reach. Even as the ball struck in the pocket of his mitt, Rob's fingers clutched it; his right leg went out and his arm came back simultaneously; like a flash the arm returned, the wrist snapped forward, and the ball shot straight and swift in a line for second. But alas! there was no one on second to receive it! McGuffy was on the way there, but although he arrived before Durand, the ball was already spinning toward centre field. Fletcher let it slip between his ankles, and Durand jogged easily home.

This was poor work. Rob pounded his fist into the hole of his mitt, disgusted and indignant. But Patterson was waiting for the signal, and there was no chance to give to McGuffy the few forcible suggestions which Rob felt that he ought to be privileged to make. Patterson settled Peters with two high ones in succession; the first a poor one which he struck at, the second a good one which he did not recognize. Then Hayes hit to Patterson and was thrown out; and Borland, after

two fouls, was caught on a swift jump ball and retired, muttering hard things at the umpire.

And now Rob had another opportunity at the bat. He still felt the sore spot on his back where O'Connell had potted him on his first appearance, but he stood up to the plate just as courageously as before, confident that O'Connell would not repeat the offence. The pitcher gave two balls, then put one squarely over, which Rob was fortunate enough to hit "on the nose." It sped away in a line over the third baseman's head out into the debatable ground, bounced just inside the foul line, then out, and rolled away into the far corner of the field. Rob raced past first and second, and reached third in safety just before the ball bounded into Durand's hands. Here he stayed while Allis went out on a hit to the second baseman, and Rorbach, waiting patiently, heard two strikes and three balls called. O'Connell dreaded a record of many bases on balls more than an additional run; so he tried to satisfy the umpire by putting one directly over, and Rorbach cracked it whizzing by O'Connell's head out over second base. Rob came home at his leisure.

Then stubby McGuffy turned his freckled face toward the pitcher, and by hitting to O'Connell unintentionally sacrificed Rorbach to second; and big Ames, with his woodchopper's swing, drove another long hit into right field and brought Rorbach in. Smart, with the resignation of a fatalist, struck out.

The tail end of the school batting list now appeared at the plate, Weaver, first baseman, and O'Connell. Neither proved a hard problem for the Second battery to solve. Weaver hit a pop foul which Ames caught, and O'Connell struck three times ingloriously. McPherson, sending a long fly to Allis, made the last out. So the third inning ended with the score four to one against the school.

Peacock, Fletcher, and Patterson all went out in the fourth on feeble infield hits, and Poole came to bat a second time, manifestly disturbed by the course of events. It was not merely the fact that the Second hit O'Connell that worried him, but the failure of the First to hit Patterson. It seemed hardly possible that a man who had so little experience in actual play should prove so

clever in the balls he used, and so effective in holding off old batsmen. Poole could not or would not understand it. He came up fiercely eager, determined to turn Patterson's luck.

The first pitch he let go by, and had the satisfaction of hearing it called a ball. The second — a straight one — he struck under and fouled. "One strike!" The third came hot, just at the level of his breast, but lifted with a sudden break as his bat swung beneath it. The fourth was obviously a ball, the fifth just as obviously ditto, but it slanted in over the corner, and from the umpire's sharp "Strike three!" there was no appeal, even for Captain Poole.

Sudbury followed, and after balls and strikes, tipped a kindergarten bounder to McGuffy, who, with the air of Little Jack Horner, stopped it and threw it within Ames's long reach. Durand profited by a fumble of Smart's to reach first, but he was caught here a minute later by Owen's quick snap to Ames — and the fourth inning was over.

In the fifth, by an error, a base on balls, and a hit, another run was added to the Second's score. The First too gained a run on a hit by Hayes and

errors. But the end came when Borland drove the ball right into Ames's hands; and Weaver, after slashing twice in vain, dropped a fair ball in front of the plate, and found Ames holding it when he reached first.

The game was over. The spectators drifted moodily down toward the school buildings, exchanging sarcastic and pessimistic comments on the work of the school nine and its prospects: "A lot of duffers;" "Couldn't hit a balloon;" "The only players on the field were the Second;" "The Clippers wouldn't have done a thing to 'em;" "Worst exhibition of baseball ever seen." Some, especially Patterson's surprised classmates, looked at the matter from a different point of view and vowed that all the trouble was due to Patterson, who was too good a pitcher for the school batters. Poole had a short talk with Lyford, and then called Patterson aside and thanked him for his good work; he must take good care of himself, for he would certainly be used frequently in the box. Lyford followed with similar compliments, and a troop of others followed Lyford. Even O'Connell came heroi-

cally with his meed of praise; and while offering congratulations on his rival's success contrived to explain that he himself had not felt at his best that day, and that it always took time for him to get his arm into shape in the spring. Unquestionably Patterson was the hero of the day.

And what of Owen? He, too, had his share of attention. Lyford assured him that he had played a good game, Poole informed him that he had hit well, some one else spoke of his throwing. But this was all. No one held him in any sense responsible for the pitching, not even those to whom Patterson protested that the credit belonged to Owen. Such statements were to be expected from a modest, reticent fellow like Patterson, who had kept his light hidden under a bushel all the year.

CHAPTER XVIII

DISAPPOINTMENTS

It was "Patterson, Patterson," all over the locker rooms while the ball men were dressing, with frequent mention of Ames, who had especially pleased the crowd, and an occasional word for Owen. The disappointment caused by the poor work of the First glorified by contrast the success of the Second. Rob had many questions to answer or evade. Wasn't he surprised at the way Patterson showed up? Was the pitcher really as good as he seemed? Could he hold his own against a strong nine? How was it that nobody knew anything about him before to-day? Before he escaped from the gymnasium Rob had replied to the same question a dozen times.

Patterson was a good man — he told the questioners — who might always be trusted to give a good account of himself if he had a fair show. Rob did not explain that a fair show involved a

suggestive and resourceful catcher, one who could guide and cheer the pitcher, as well as hold the ball and throw to bases. That would have been tantamount to asserting that Patterson's success had been due to his catcher, and Rob would never have taken this attitude even in his secret thoughts. Patterson certainly had the skill and the power; the difficulty was that he didn't understand how to use them.

Outside the gymnasium Owen was hailed by Poole and Lyford.

"You fellows gave us a shock to-day," said Poole. "I didn't enjoy it myself, but it's going to do us a lot of good. Lyford and I have talked things over and have agreed that we've got to make a place for you on the nine."

Rob's heart was fluttering with a delightful anticipation which was reflected in his face. Were they really going to recognize the merit of his work?

"Did you ever play in the outfield?" continued Poole.

From joyful expectation to hopelessness, Rob's plunge was sudden and cruel. Only by a strong

effort of will and by turning his head quickly away could he prevent his face from betraying him.

"No, never. I've always caught or played first."

"Well, you see, we've got a good catcher in Borland, who's had lots of experience and is a mighty steady man in a game; and with Weaver, who played first last year, and big Ames, who showed up so well in the game to-day, we're pretty well fixed for first basemen. So the only way seems to be to work you in somewhere in the outfield — say at right — as a regular thing; and then use you when necessary for substitute catcher."

"You'd better take Rorbach," said Owen, almost sullenly. "He hits well and is used to the job."

"We will, if he turns out to be better," returned Poole, with a smile, "but we'll try you first anyway. We shall have to ask you to turn Patterson over to Borland. If he gets on well with Patterson, we may want you to see what you can do with O'Connell."

"If you could help him along as you did Patterson," said the coach, "you might make a good deal of him."

Rob pressed his lips tight together, with a firmness that pursed them out and left wrinkles in the corners. It was a habit of his when angered, as some boys grow red, and others white, and still others gape and glare. On this occasion his set lips served him well, for they kept back the retort which in cooler moments he must have regretted. What he did not say but wanted to was that it would be many moons before any one would find him wasting himself on a mule like O'Connell, and that he didn't propose to train pitchers for Borland to use. So he said nothing, but merely nodded a rather ungracious adieu as the coach and captain left him and went on down to the basement floor of the gymnasium. On the way in, Poole remarked that Owen had a queer streak in him, but was a good fellow all right; and the coach, that the boy seemed rather sullen. It was too bad, for he was evidently a ball player.

Rob stamped up to his room and flung himself

down into his Morris chair. There, stretched out, with his hands in his pockets and his cap slipping down over his nose, he gave himself a prey to most disagreeable reflections. So they were bound to make him play in the out-field! He could do it, he supposed, as well as the next man, but it was like taking a fellow who had always played quarter-back and setting him to play end. He must learn an entirely new game, crowd out a better man — Rorbach could field the position twice as well as he could — and in the end probably do the poorest work of the lot. And to take away Patterson, who had practised with him all winter and really owed to his catcher his whole improvement as a pitcher, to take away Patterson and give him to Borland, who had never done a thing for anybody, was outrageous. Why couldn't Poole give him as fair a show as he did Borland? Hadn't he caught just as good a game that afternoon? The details of the record were still vivid in his memory: against Borland one passed ball, two missed third strikes, one high throw to second; for himself not an error, and two as good snaps to bases as he had ever made in his

life, even if that chump, McGuffy, didn't cover! Good work evidently went for nothing in this place.

And then he fell to thinking of Patterson and his point of view. Would Pat throw him over without a protest, as Carle had done, when the chance came to pose as first string pitcher with last year's catcher to back him? Not if he knew Patterson! Patterson knew where his strength lay. Pat would be loyal to his catcher to the end. But this, after all, wasn't the worst feature in the prospect. Supposing they should make him pitch to Borland against his will, and Borland shouldn't know how to manage him, and just at the time when encouragement and guidance and right method were especially important, Pat should slump, would he be able to recover his courage and speed and skill again? Rob had his doubts. Pat needed careful nursing.

A knock at the door broke in on these dismal thoughts.

"Come in!" sang out the dejected one from the chair, without troubling himself to remove his hands from his pockets or lift the cap from his

nose. It was Laughlin's big body that filled the doorway.

"Hello! Seen anything of Lindsay?"

Rob straightened up and brushed off his cap. "No, not since he left the campus. He spoke to me after the game. Come in, won't you?"

"I guess not," replied the football man. And then, having verbally declined, he contradicted himself by entering and planting his back against the door. "I wanted to see him about that debate between the Laurel Leaf and the Soule Society. You know we're on a committee to arrange it. Tell him I tried to find him, won't you, when he comes in?"

"Yes, I usually see him after dinner."

"I went up to see your game for a little while this afternoon," went on Laughlin, settling down into a stout arm-chair opposite Rob. "I couldn't stay long, for I had a job; but I saw some good back-stop work the little while I was there."

Rob waited expectant, his eyes on the floor. His pulse was beating a trifle faster, while under the pleasing warmth that stole into his heart the morbid depression had fled. Laughlin was not

a baseball authority, but he was a man looked up to and respected and followed not more for his achievement as captain of a winning eleven than for the strength of his personal character. His good opinion was in itself a compliment, all the more desirable as he was known to be a close friend of Poole.

"I thought both you and Borland caught well," continued Laughlin; "but while I was there it seemed to me that you were having the best of it. That throw of yours that Reddy was too slow for just took me. Why, the ball looked as if it was shooting along a wire! And how quickly you got it off, too! I don't see how you manage it."

"Oh, I don't always do as well as that," protested Owen, beaming with delight, "though I'm usually fairly good at getting a man at second. There's a knack in it, you know, and I've had considerable practice."

"Patterson is a kind of dark horse, isn't he? I hadn't heard anything about him until lately."

"He's been working with me in the cage all winter," replied Rob, with some complacency.

"I knew he was good, but no one else seemed to get on to him. He's improved a lot."

"Well, I hope he'll go right on improving. Perhaps it's you two who are going to win the Hillbury game for us!"

Alas for the catcher's self-complacency! This grouping of Owen and Patterson and the Hillbury game brought Rob suddenly back from the delightful vision of what might have been to the reality of the present. It wasn't to be Patterson and Owen now, but Patterson and Borland. Owen was relegated to right field, and to catching O'Connell! The sunlight suddenly disappeared from Rob's ingenuous face, and black discouragement replaced it. Laughlin observed him with curiosity.

"Only it'll be Patterson and Borland in the Hillbury game," Rob said, regaining his smile by main force. "Poole's going to have Patterson pitch to Borland after this."

"How's that?" demanded Laughlin. And Rob explained with an explanation which suggested a question, and the question in turn produced an answer involving another question,

and so there developed a chain of questions and answers linked together like the mathematical series Laughlin had been studying that week in his advanced algebra, but unlike them in having a definite limit and result. This result was that Rob threw aside his reserve and told the whole story of his ambition and disappointment, from the first weeks of the fall when Carle forgot him, through the months of independent cage work with Patterson, to the disheartening issue of that afternoon's game.

"It isn't that I'm such a wonder," he concluded, "or that I want to play whether I'm better than Borland or not; but I don't think it's right for 'em to assume that I'm no good, and pay no attention to what I do. And then to take Patterson away from me just when I've got him into shape, when he wouldn't be worth a cent if I hadn't coached him all winter — I call that dirty mean!"

Laughlin rose and went to the window, where he stood for a brief time gazing across the way at the village urchins noisily romping before their schoolhouse. Then he turned: "It does seem hard luck, but I've found out that things usually

turn out right if you're right yourself. I, for one, was glad to hear that Carle had gone. He isn't the stuff good men are made of. If he had stayed, he'd have played us some worse trick. Poole doesn't think so, but Poole doesn't know such fellows as well as I do. Another thing Poole doesn't know is that you're really a better catcher than Borland. It's up to you to go straight ahead and play your game as well as you can, and he'll see what you are before the season's over. When he does see, he'll chuck Borland in a minute. Poole is as straight a fellow as ever breathed, but he makes mistakes like the rest of us. I know from my own experience as captain that it's hard always to pick out the best man. There was Wolcott Lindsay last fall playing on the second eleven up to two weeks of the Hillbury game; and in the game, light as he was, he turned out the best guard on the field. Take my advice: just hold on, play your best game all the time, and keep your courage up."

They stood confronting each other — Laughlin, a square, powerful figure with sincerity and earnestness apparent in every tone of his voice and every

line of his rugged face; Owen, with eyes aflame and cheeks flushed, eagerly drinking in his visitor's words. It was appreciation like this that he had been pining for; it gladdened him and at the same time thrilled him through and through.

"There's another thing you can learn from Lindsay's experience," the football man went on. "It pays to work up. The best athletes in the school have almost always been those who had to make a place for themselves. The fellows who come with reputations and condescend to play usually slump early."

He held out his hand. "I must be going; well, good luck to you!"

"Thank you a lot," rejoined Owen, eagerly grasping the big, thick fist. "You won't say anything to Poole about this, will you?"

"Of course not; you've got to work your own way out."

Laughlin was just reaching for the door-knob, when a scurry of feet was heard from across the hall, and the door burst open to admit Simmons, who rushed into the room in a flurry of excitement most unusual in the quiet little student.

CHAPTER XIX

A MISFIT BATTERY

THE moment his foot touched the threshold Simmons began to exclaim: "It was perfectly great! I'm awfully glad I went! He's got a peach of a canoe, and what he doesn't know about animals and reptiles and birds —" He stopped suddenly as he caught sight of the massive form of the venerated Laughlin looming behind the door. "Oh, excuse me, I didn't know any one was here."

"No one but me," said the visitor, "and though I'm big, I'm not dangerous. Who's got the peach of a canoe?"

"Payner," answered Simmons, throwing a questioning look at Owen.

"That's the fellow that's been working the plagues on the Pecks, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Simmons, eagerly. "How did you know about it?"

"Oh, everybody knows something about it," returned Laughlin, with a grin. "I suppose he was after material. What number has he reached now?"

"I think he's getting ready for Number Six," said Simmons, gravely. "He didn't say what it was to be, but he told me all sorts of things he might do. If he does everything he talks about he'll have to put them three at a time to keep within ten. He showed me where he got the newts he put in the clothes-bag, and where he used to catch turtles and water-snakes, and the old stumps where he dug out salamanders. He says that below the falls, on Salt River, you can catch all sorts of things when the tide's out — dip up young eels by the pailful. They'd do to put in the water pitchers."

"I shouldn't care for them in mine," observed Laughlin.

"When it gets warmer there are going to be more things," Simmons continued, growing more confidential and serious as he proceeded. "All sorts of bugs, for example, and hornets' nests that you can take off in the night and throw in through

the windows. It's easy to get half a pint of ants from any big ant hill if you only know how, and the brown-tail moth caterpillars they talk so much about — the hairs fly and are poisonous, you know — it wouldn't be at all hard to find a nest with the caterpillars just in the right stage outside the town somewhere. Then he took me into his room and showed me an enormous spider he had in a bottle — he got it from home — and asked me how I thought the Pecks would like it to find such a thing in their pajamas some night. Isn't it awful!"

Simmons stopped for breath, and looked horror-struck from face to face.

"What's it all for, anyway?" asked Laughlin.

"Why, the Pecks ripped up his room, and spoiled some of his specimens," explained Rob. "He wants them to apologize and agree to let him alone. They won't do it."

"Oh, I remember now," Laughlin said. "One of them came to me about a month ago, and asked me what to do. I gave him a raking down for playing such fool tricks, and told him to go and apologize and try to patch it up with Payner. I

don't know which it was. I never could tell 'em apart."

"It was Duncan," said Owen. "I gave him the same advice. He's willing to do the right thing, but the other one keeps him back."

"Well, let them suffer then, that's all I've got to say," remarked Laughlin. "I've no sympathy to waste on fools or fellows who won't own up when they're in the wrong."

The senior departed, leaving Owen comforted and reassured. He could afford to wait, he told himself after his caller had gone. Let them give Patterson to Borland if they wished. Borland couldn't manage him, Rob was convinced, and when the new combination failed, Patterson would come back to him, and the pair could start again and work up together. Then it would be clear which was the better catcher, and which battery was the more useful to the school. Yes, Laughlin was right; it was better to work one's way up than to claim a high place at the outset and afterward have to change to the lowest, like the man in the parable who was bidden to a feast. But it was hard on Pat!

In the meantime Simmons had disappeared. He came in again soon, and rather shamefacedly confessed that he had been laboring with the Pecks.

"What luck?" asked Rob; "did they bluff you?"

"That's just what they did. Duncan laughed at me and Donald said he wasn't afraid of anything Payner could produce, either fresh or canned. I told them I merely wanted to warn them of what was before them, and Donald said the chief thing before them was to wipe up the ground with Payner. Then I said they'd better look out, for Payner had a gun, and Donald said he'd need it. I didn't seem to be getting on, so I cleared out."

Owen laughed. "You may as well let them alone. They're looking for trouble, and if they find it it's their own fault."

That evening Duncan stopped Simmons on the way out to Front Street and thanked him for coming to warn them. "I didn't say anything while you were there," he added, "because I knew Don and I'd have a big row about it, and I

thought our rows ought to be private. And we did have it after you went, red hot. I'll tell you on the fair, I'm dead sick of the whole thing; it's got on to my nerves and spoils all my fun. We have to keep the door locked all the time, we don't dare open the windows, some one has to be here when the chambermaid comes in, and we're always scared that something's going to happen, — that there'll be some crawly thing in the bed, or under it, or hidden in our pajamas, or tucked into our shoes, or coming down the chimney. I never open a bureau drawer without standing back as far as I can, for fear of something jumping in my face. It's terrible. The sword of Damocles was nothing to it. If Payner'd be satisfied with my apology, I'd go in a minute!"

"He wouldn't be," answered Simmons, with a sad shake of his head. The burden of anxiety for peace in the dormitory lay heavy on poor Simmons's shoulders!

Does some one ask why the teachers are not called in to adjudicate such differences, or how a feud like this could go on undetected by Dr. Mann on the floor below, and Mrs. Gray, the

matron, making her daily rounds among the rooms? To such be it explained that except in story books and school circulars, or where small children are concerned, teachers and pupils live in two distinct worlds, between which there is lawful communication only by regular channels. No self-respecting boy above the primary age seeks faculty help against his fellows. He may consult a trusted teacher about his own affairs, his studies, his health, his morals, his religion; about his relations with other boys he may sometimes ask advice, but assistance never. In the school life he must fight fair, and the first rule of fair fighting is: No intervention, no tale-bearing, keep it among ourselves!

Rob's thoughts did not linger on the affairs of the Pecks. The first real game was coming on Wednesday with the N—— University nine. Rob's whole attention in the two practice days before was concentrated on learning about the play of his new position from Poole and Lyford — in fact from any one who could give him information. He knew, of course, that in theory a fielder while running for a batted ball is supposed to keep

in mind the positions of the base runners and anticipate their movements so that when the ball is at last in his hands he need waste no time in sending it to the right place. In putting this obvious theory into practice, though suffering from lack of experience, Rob had the advantage of his catcher's training in watching bases. In throwing in from the field, however, this catcher's training was distinctly a handicap, for the short-line throws across the diamond are very different from the long returns from the outfield. Rob could catch flies as well as any one, but he despaired of ever feeling at home in right field.

Patterson took the change of catchers still more to heart. When Poole informed him of the new arrangement, he stood aghast, too much astonished to protest. But he immediately made full speed for Rob's room, and there he vowed that he should not, could not, would not pitch to Borland or any one else but Owen; they might drop him if they chose. Here Rob's newly acquired courage served him in good stead. He explained that Poole was promoting

Patterson to a better catcher, that he had no reason to think that Borland would not do for him quite as much as Owen could, and that in any case they must both obey orders and work for the success of the nine. Patterson listened, was half convinced, and yielded.

So it happened that when the game with N—— University opened, there were two players on the Seaton nine, the pitcher and the right-fielder, who felt ill at ease in their positions. The Seatonians were in the field. Big Ames was at first, in place of Weaver. Patterson, seeking to make up for lack of confidence by enforced deliberateness, slowly raised his arm and shot in the first ball. The batsman let it go and the umpire called a strike. Then came a ball and a strike in succession; and then, following Borland's signal, Patterson threw a drop, the batsman hit the ball on the upper side, sending a slow grounder toward third. Durand ran up to meet it and flung it hastily and wide to first, where Ames, stretching to his full awkward length, held it and saved an error. The next man went out on strikes, the third on an easy fly to Owen. The

Seatonians came in to bat, and went out as easily as their predecessors.

Then in the second inning came trouble. The first man up sent a fly to Poole, and of course was out. The second was given a straight, swift ball which was called a strike; Borland signalled to repeat, but the batsman was ready this time and drove the ball out into centre field so far that he had no difficulty in taking second. The next man bunted and beat Borland's throw to first. Worried by this, Patterson sent the third man to first, on balls, and the bases were full. The batter following fouled out to Durand, and the spectators felt better.

Two men out and the bases full! The new batsman came up, recognizing his opportunity clearly. The first ball looked poor, and he let it pass — a strike! The second he struck at but did not hit. Patterson held the ball and watched his catcher's signal — *Straight over.* It was risky, he saw plainly, and contrary to the principles laid down by Owen; but Borland was supposed to know, and it would really be a feather in his cap

to strike out the third man with the bases full. And he put it straight over.

Crack! sounded the bat. With a start Patterson wheeled about and watched the ball soar over Sudbury's head and bound far away in the tennis nets. The batsman raced around the bases, touching the plate just as the ball reached Patterson once more. Four men had scored on the hit!

The next man went easily out, but Patterson was not to be comforted. He blamed himself; but of this he was sure, if Owen had been behind the plate the thing would never have happened.

"Never take chances with the bases full," Owen had always preached, and Patterson, as he sat scowling on the bench, thought of his four spare balls and groaned in bitterness of spirit. Durand got a hit, Owen went to first on balls, and Ames brought one of them in, but Patterson was not encouraged. In the next inning he let his opponents make three hits that yielded two runs, and at the beginning of the fourth O'Connell appeared in his place in the pitcher's box.

How it happened that Seaton won that game in spite of the handicap of five runs at the fourth

inning was explained in various ways. Some said O'Connell's pitching had held the enemy down; others that luck and good fielding by Seaton and bad errors on the part of the visitors were the chief causes. All agreed that the nine had shown an encouraging ability to hit the ball and play an uphill game.

Such consolation as Owen was able to give during their intermittent presence together on the bench, Patterson received with stolidity and monosyllables. He was meditating a radical move. After the game was over he sought out Poole.

"Borland told me to pitch that ball," he said abruptly to the captain. "I could have struck that man out."

"I'm sorry you didn't, then," replied the captain, good-naturedly. "I don't count it against you. You'll have better luck next time. Besides, when you've had more practice with Borland you'll understand each other better."

"I'm not going to have any more practice with Borland," replied Patterson, quietly. "If you ever want me to pitch again, you must give me Owen to catch me. I'll pitch to no one else."

CHAPTER XX

A SUB-SEATONIAN

LET it not be supposed that the pleasures and pains of the Pecks, or Owen's ambition to become recognized as a catcher, or the affairs of the middle entry of Hale, represent the chief happenings of the season at Seaton. From the opening of the spring term baseball is indeed the most absorbing subject of student conversation, and the nearer the Hillbury game approaches, the more widely discussed are the prospects of the nine and the more general is the interest in it. But on the morning of every week-day throughout the school year the seven-forty-five chapel bell calls together four hundred boys. From eight to six, with intermission for luncheon, changing squads are crowding hourly in and out of the recitation rooms, where strenuous teachers crack their pedagogical whips in mock fury over the heads of their victims. Each of these four hundred

has his own ambitions and interests; each serves and enjoys the school in his own way. They group themselves in scores of combinations. There are state clubs, debating clubs, musical clubs, modern language clubs, college clubs, fraternities. Boys are laboring for scholarships, for prizes of all kinds, for positions on school papers and athletic teams, for honors at graduation, for offices, for entrance to college, for the plain privilege of staying at school. While Payner is catching bugs, Woodford is shooting clay pigeons, Thornton playing a mandolin, Ford running the Assembly Club, Allen preparing to beat the Harvard Freshmen at debate, and Smith plugging away at Cicero and Homer and history with the resignation of a holy man of Tibet walled up in a cave. And many there are who go to and fro in obscurity, mere names on class lists or voices on the cheering benches. Yet who would venture to assert that among these insignificants some distinguished man of the future may not be hidden?

Among the episodes of the year entirely unconnected with baseball was that of the delayed

senior dinner and the presence thereat of the little thirteen-year-old townie who sat in state at the right of the toastmaster and consumed ice cream and cake in quantities quite out of proportion to his size. Robert Owen had nothing to do with the affair, except to hear of it at first hand from Wolcott Lindsay and Durand, when the pair came exulting home late at night, eager to find an upper middler to inform and gloat over. So Rob was routed out and sat in pajamas blinking at the lamp while the seniors narrated. When at last it became clear that they had ceased to narrate, and were merely jeering, Rob rallied his forces, vowed that they were interfering with his baseball training, and drove them out. Their tale, with the necessary introductions, is as follows:—

Class rivalry at Seaton is a matter of years and circumstances. At the time of the class football games in the fall, when the lower middlers combined with the seniors to rush the field after the senior-upper middle game, and stole away the ball which the upper middlers had won, Rob's classmates had indulged in violent talk of retribution. On the week after, however, had occurred

the Hillbury game in which several members of the offending class had won new laurels for the school. The feeling of complacency and brotherhood engendered by the victory was fatal to the spirit of civil strife. The plots for vengeance apparently died a natural death with no likelihood of revival.

So at least it seemed to the school at large. A few rash spirits, whose pretended resentment was but an excuse for a lark, thought otherwise. Acting on the principle that it is easiest to strike when the foe is least expectant, they prepared for war in the midst of peace. Poole, who was president of the class, was expected to preside at the senior dinner. This, of course, the conspirators knew; they likewise knew his habits and companions. He usually went from his room outside the yard to the post-office for the evening mail, and thence either to the school recreation room at Merrill Hall or to some friend's or to his fraternity house, to spend the hour before evening study began. On the night of the dinner he would be likely to make his visit to the post-office somewhat earlier. If he could be

caught alone on the way thither, or while answering some fictitious summons, he might be seized, crammed into a hack, and driven to a place of security. If he should mysteriously disappear before the dinner took place, and stay disappeared a reasonable length of time, the dinner would be spoiled. For even if the seniors ultimately proceeded without their president, the feast must have lost much of its savor through delay, and how could the encomiums on the class be anything but flat with the proof of its inferiority so crushingly evident?

As Payner and Simmons came paddling down the river again that afternoon, they overhauled young Wally Sedgwick in his canoe voyaging homeward. Payner knew Wally, having run across him more than once on these expeditions, and found him possessed of much local information of a varied character.

"Hello!" shouted Payner, "been swimming?"

"Nope," answered Wally, poising his paddle. "My mother made me promise not to till it gets warmer. Have you?"

"Yes," lied Payner; "the water is great."

But Wally either didn't believe him or didn't care. "Say, did you see those fellows back there on the bank? What were they doing?"

"Oh, I don't know!" replied Payner, ungraciously. He had seen among them the Pecks and Milliken and Barclay, and that was enough. "Up to mischief, probably. Come on, we'll race you down."

"Thank you," returned the boy; "I guess I'm in no hurry."

Sloper Stevens, who lay outstretched in the bow, dragging his hands in the water, was in no hurry either, so, as the students passed out of sight around the next bend in the river, Wally turned the nose of his canoe up stream again. The suggestion that the knot of students he had lately passed were up to something wrong whetted his curiosity. What crime could they commit here? They weren't stealing wood or cutting trees.

The students appeared on the river bank beneath some tall pines, and looked up and down the wood road and pointed at the river and at some place behind them in the woods. Wally watched them in half concealment in the shelter

of an old stump which projected into the river. They disappeared now and presently came out into view again farther up, where they again pointed and surveyed. Such conduct was incomprehensible, and therefore interesting to Wally, who had seen students up the river before and knew their ways. They usually came by twos and threes in boats or canoes, sometimes seriously with books, more often sprawling on the seats, laughing, singing, innocently engaged in killing time. If they went ashore they stretched themselves on their backs under the trees, or stripped and went swimming. These fellows were different; they seemed to be in search of something.

"Going to stay here all night?" demanded Sloper. "'Cause if you are I'm going to get out and walk."

"I'm going," answered Wally, swinging the bow again down-stream. He also had recognized Milliken and Barclay and the two Pecks, the first because he was the great back in the school eleven, known to every boy in town, the second as the captain of the upper middle eleven, and the Pecks — well, just because they were "the

two Pecks." Wally's sympathies were not with the upper middle class. Next fall he was to be a junior himself, and as a junior would side with upper middlers against lower middlers and seniors. The present upper middlers would be the seniors of next year — hence his natural foes. Wally knew where his allegiance lay.

That night at supper Wally was subdued and meditative. Mr. Sedgwick asked him first if he were tired, and then if he had been swimming, both of which questions Wally answered with an indignant negative. The maternal suggestions were that it was too hard for him in the High School and that he didn't go to bed early enough. These explanations also displeased Master Wally, for he did not wish his work in the High School to be too closely investigated, and no boy likes to be sent early to bed. So he cut his dessert short — he didn't care much for that dessert anyway — and got excused to go to the post-office.

On the way he still wrestled with the problem of the students under the pines. At the supper table he had decided that they must be preparing

for an initiation. On further reflection, however, this theory appeared untenable. The members of the fraternities wear flat gray hats with bands of special stripes. Wally had seen two different fraternity hatbands among the crowd. Besides, the fraternity fellows belong to different classes, and these were all upper middlers.

He took the letters from the box at the office, pushed them into his coat pocket, and sauntered up the lane and through the Academy yard. If he could only run across Eddy, now, or John Somes or French, all students of his acquaintance, he would ask them. It was just growing dusk. As he passed through the gate at the upper end he saw a hack drawn up beside the road. The driver, with his back to the street, seemed to be very busy with the harness. In the vehicle a man with gray hair and spectacles sat crowded into a corner.

Ahead Wally caught sight of the familiar figure of the baseball captain hurrying down the street toward him. He knew Poole, of course, as did every urchin in town; but he had the advantage of the other urchins in the fact that Poole knew him. Poole had made Wally's acquaintance at

the birthday party of Wally's older sister. Since that time the baseball captain had never failed to recognize the boy. To-night, however, either from preoccupation or because he was hastening to meet an appointment, Poole passed him by without a word.

The disappointed boy turned and gazed after the retreating senior. The latter had gone but a few steps when he was apparently summoned by the occupant of the hack. Wally saw him turn to the carriage door and lean in as if to hear the words of the old man inside. Then two figures crept out from the yard of the house near by, stole up behind the unsuspicious Poole, seized him, threw him into the carriage, tumbled in themselves, and pulled the door to and the curtain down. Wally stood with bulging eyes, hearing the throttled yell and the sound of struggle within the hack, and seeing the driver whip his horses into a sudden gallop.

"Barclay and Milliken as sure as guns!" thought Master Wally. "They're running off with Poole!" and forthwith Wally began to run, after the hack and homeward where the letters

must be delivered and where his bicycle still stood leaning against the fence, as he had left it when he came from school at one o'clock. As he plied his legs, his thoughts also were nimble, and he marked well the direction the hack was taking. That morning on the way to school Jack Sanders had told him that the seniors were to have a dinner to-night, and asked him if he remembered the time two years before when the middlers tried to bribe Shorty McDougal to sneak into the hotel kitchen and pinch the ice cream. Milliken and Barclay! It wasn't hard to guess now what those fellows were doing up river!

Wally threw his letters on the hall table — fortunately without meeting any inconvenient member of the family — and dashed out again. The entrance to the river road was through the Gilman farm across the bridge. The hack had gone down Elm Street, evidently taking a circuitous route to avoid passing through the centre of the town. If he sprinted, he could beat it to the Gilmans' yet!

Panting from his efforts, trembling with eagerness, Wally leaned his bicycle against a tree,

scrambled behind a stone wall, and crouched on the ground. He was none too soon. Almost immediately came the sound of wheels on the highway, and a hack turned into the lane and swept by him down the incline to the river. At the gate by the lower barn it stopped, and the sound of voices came back, as of greetings and exclamations. Then the gate was opened and shut again; and the tread of horses' hoofs and the rumble of wheels died away in the river mists.

CHAPTER XXI

PLAYING INDIANS

WALLY'S first impulse had been to get to the scene of excitement at the earliest possible moment, in order to lose nothing of the spectacle. Like most boys, he regarded himself as unfairly treated if fun was going on in which he had no share. But here he had met an obstacle. He was alone — and, as everybody knows, a boy can have no fun alone. Moreover, when he came to think of it, he had really done nothing and seen nothing. He had no tale to tell the boys the next morning that would not be met with "Then what did you do?" Close on the heels of these impressions followed the reflection that it was a dirty trick to play on the captain of the nine in the baseball season, that Poole was a friend of his, and that the kidnappers belonged to a class to which by all rules of tradition and custom his own class was to be antagonistic. Poole's pre-

dicament appealed to his sympathy. When he imagined the insolent delight of the captors at the success of their raid, they seemed in some way his own enemies, striking at him. Would the seniors find their president and bring him back? He sincerely hoped they might.

Wally mounted his bicycle and rode homeward. As he went a great purpose gradually swelled his heart and put force into his pedal strokes. He left the bicycle at the usual place, but avoided the front door as too perilous and crept in through the kitchen and up the backstairs to his room. There he pulled on a dark jersey, slipped into his pocket the flash lamp which Uncle Joe had given him at Christmas, and crept out by the kitchen door again to his faithful wheel.

Ten minutes later Wally sat in his canoe, paddling vigorously up the river. Dusk had faded into darkness, but the stars gave appreciable light, and the river was familiar to him. He knew every turn and shallow in the stream, every clump of bushes on the banks, every group of trees, every leaning stump. He passed the wide mouth of Little River, lying silent at the

foot of the new Playing Field, and entered the straight stretch beside the Park, where the tall, overhanging trees on either side and the sluggish, murky water beneath formed a gloomy tunnel through which the wind blew, chill and dispiriting. But Wally was not one to be frightened by the bugaboo of darkness; the mysterious depths had no terrors for him. His work kept him warm, despite the wind, while the strip of stars above his head cheered with their friendly presence. He could see, too, on the water, not clearly but well enough to make his course; and his thoughts, set eagerly on his destination, were unaffected by the perils of the way.

So the little craft pushed its nose steadily upward against wind and current, while the gurgle of water from the paddle was hardly audible above the sighing of the wind through the naked branches.

And now he was abreast of the entrance to the cove, a broad inlet stretching deep into the woods, and crossed midway by a causeway and bridge. Over the bridge led the forest road along which

the kidnappers had taken their victim. It came out close to the river again beyond the next point, and Wally, fearful that hostile eyes might peer at him from the darkness, put into practice the trick of silent paddling he had learned the summer before, — dipping the blade vertically into the water and lifting it cautiously at the end of the stroke. Another bend would bring him in sight of his goal!

The sound of voices and of laughter reached his ears and set his heart beating hard. Some one was thrashing about in the undergrowth, sticks were being broken; as he advanced the glint of fire flashed occasionally past the tree trunks. They were there! As he rounded the last point, the scene was partially revealed. He worked his way still farther along the bank to a tree which sagged over the river, affording a protecting shadow. From here he had a satisfactory view.

They had built a fire near the bank. Some one — it looked like Barclay — was piling fuel on. Around were standing or moving a dozen fellows, while against a big oak in the background, stand-

ing as if his hands were tied behind him, was Poole. The flames, flaring up through a fresh armful of brush, threw a bright light on the faces of those beyond, behind whose moving figures Poole's form was alternately eclipsed and revealed. The whole scene reminded Wally of an incident in one of his favorite Indian tales, in which young braves dance around their campfire and jeer at their captive bound to a tree.

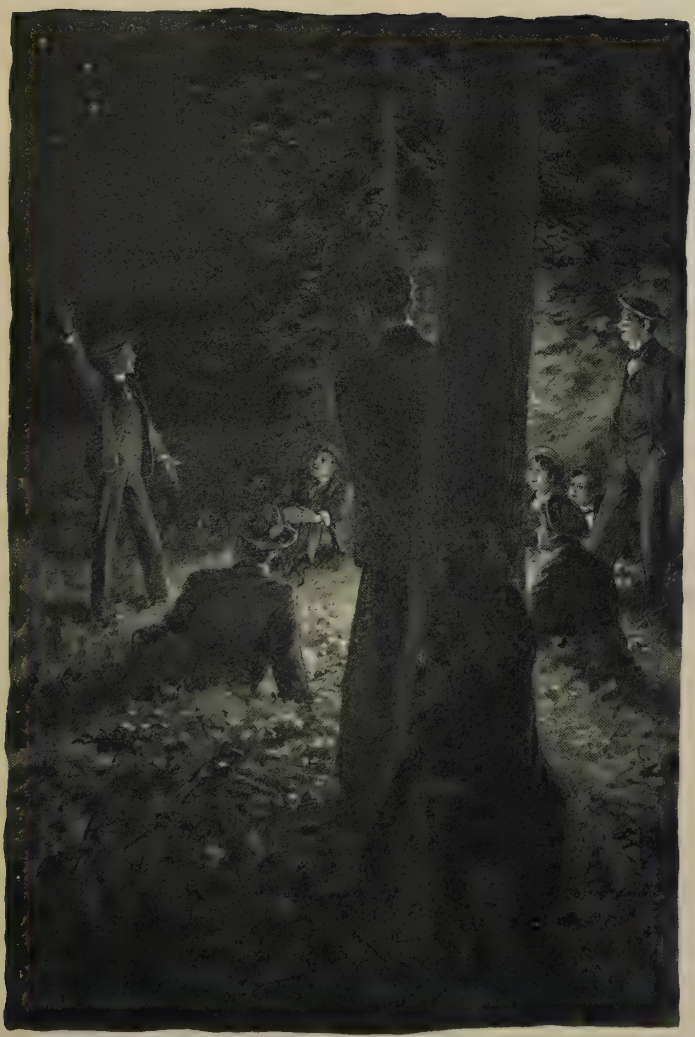
When Wally played Indians with his boy friends he always chose the part of the white man taken captive rather than of the Indian captors. He chose the same part now. Over behind Poole's tree was a clump of spruces in which he and another boy had once hidden for an hour, while the Indians vainly searched the woods all about them. A big rock was there, with side sloping outward in an overhang and a group of young spruces growing close against the edge. If Poole could escape like the white captive in the story, what an elegant hiding-place lay ready at hand! Wally slipped his moorings and let his canoe drift back around the point. Then he made fast the painter to a root, and went cautiously ashore.

Poole had obeyed the false summons to the telephone office without a suspicion. Even when the elderly stranger in the hack had beckoned to him, he had hesitated only from reluctance to waste time already pledged to other uses, not from any fear of treachery. When, therefore, he felt himself precipitated into the carriage, he was for the moment too much surprised by the sudden attack to reason about the situation. Instinctively he turned to strike back at the fellows who were amusing themselves in this cheap way by shoving him into a carriage. As he fell, he brought down the old man's beard, and the old man's very muscular arms folded about him, while Milliken and Barclay came diving in upon them both. Then when it was too late the true explanation flashed upon him.

They held him securely pinioned, with Milliken's big hand covering his mouth, and all three urging continuously their great regret at being compelled to use such rough measures, the folly of any attempt to escape or make outcry, and the wisdom of submitting calmly to the inevitable, during the rapid but somewhat roundabout drive

to the Gilman barn. Once out of hearing of the street they stopped the hack, got out with their burden, and took the remainder of the way on foot, the exulting company surrounding the captive in a mock bodyguard and paying sarcastic homage. Puzzle his brains as he would, Poole could see no chance of escape. His only hope was that his classmates would not wait long for his appearance.

Among the pines, while some prepared material for the fire, others argued with the prisoner. If he would give his word not to escape, they would leave him unbound. But Poole was not to be persuaded. He was there by force, and force alone should keep him. He would make no promises; they must take full responsibility for their action. So they tied his hands behind him and fastened him to the oak tree by a stout rope. After this they danced about the fire, and made sarcastic comments on the course which the dinner was probably taking, and facetiously invited him to partake of certain dishes which were presumably being served. Soon, however, chilled by Poole's silence and show of dignity, the kid-



HE FELT THE BONDS THAT HELD HIM TO THE TREE LOOSEN.
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nappers abandoned this form of baiting also, and devoted themselves to keeping up the fire, to smoking and lively chatter.

A half-hour may have passed when Poole heard a low, softly repeated hiss behind the tree, which evidently was not made by the wind. He turned his head slightly and hissed in return. Then a low, boyish voice which Poole did not recognize whispered: "I'm going to cut the rope; sneak round the tree and come with me. Don't say anything."

Poole's heart leaped with joy at this sudden offer of aid, unknown though the source; but he tried hard to make no movement and show no change of expression. He felt the bonds that held him to the tree loosen. He did not start, because Barclay's eyes were resting on him from across the fire, and he wanted the advantage of the second or two which he should gain by slipping away when the attention was elsewhere. Presently Duncan Peck offered an impersonation of Reddy McGuffy speaking from the floor in a debate at the Laurel Leaf. This drew all eyes, and was accompanied by such running fire of

laughter and comment that no one noticed the slight rustle made by their prisoner as he detached himself from the tree and crept around it.

A small boy rose before him and led the way straight through the shadow of the tree into the deeper darkness of the woods. Poole followed blindly, hampered by his tied hands, fearing to run lest he fall and flounder, expecting at every step to hear behind the shout and plunge of swift pursuers.

"We're almost there!" whispered the guide. "Hurry!"

Where *there* was Poole had no idea, but he found out a dozen steps farther on, for just as a frightful yell rose from the camp, his guide suddenly whispered, "Wait a second!" and disappeared, apparently swallowed by the earth.

But before Poole could move, a momentary flash of the pocket light behind a rock showed him a hole toward which he threw himself and wriggled in.

"Turn over and I'll cut the rope," the boy breathed in his ear. Poole obeyed. "Gee, here they come!" whispered the unknown with a giggle of joyful excitement.

The pursuers had at first flocked to the oak, hoping to find their victim close at hand. Then for a moment they stood dazed.

"Perhaps he's up the tree," suggested Robins.

"Why, his hands are tied, you fool," retorted Milliken. "He can't climb and he can't run; he's lying somewhere on the ground. Spread out and find him!"

So they spread out, yelling, scolding, groping, stumbling. The fugitives heard them brushing by. One fellow tripped over the edge of their sheltering rock and picked himself up, muttering imprecations. Wally strove to suppress a giggle, but Poole nerved himself for a dash in case he was discovered. His hands were free now and he felt ready to take any chance.

"Let's sneak for the cove bridge," whispered Poole. "We can get by them in the woods."

"Not on your life! They've got two guys watching down there. Wait a little longer. I've got a canoe here on the river."

"Come back! Come back!" shouted in unison a trio of wiser heads who perceived that their search in the darkness was both useless and dan-

gerous. The rest came scrambling back, each demanding eagerly as he came: "Have you got him?" "Where is he?" "Who found him?"

"Nobody's found him," said Milliken, "but we don't want to lose the rest of you. Let him stay in the woods all night if he wants to. As long as he don't get to the dinner, what do we care? What we've got to do is to watch the bridge and the road from here to High Street, and see that he doesn't sneak round us and get out."

"Why, he couldn't do it if he tried all night," said Brown. "It's a mile round the cove, through the worst kind of woods and swamp, and high-water too. He never could do it."

"That's what I say," replied Milliken. "If we guard the cove bridge and the two bridges in town we've got him anyway."

The squad took the one lantern they had brought with them and marched off to guard duty, making their first halt at the cove bridge. The fire had died down; silence reigned under the pines. Wally crept out to reconnoitre, and returned with the news that the coast was clear. He

thought with some uneasiness of the anxiety his absence might be producing at home. He devoutly hoped they wouldn't worry; perhaps they supposed he was at the library. At any rate, he was eager to get away. Poole, of course, was no less eager.

They reached the canoe without mishap. Each took a paddle and, with the spring current to help them, pushed rapidly down. As they slid past the entrance to the cove they looked across and chuckled to see the gleam of the lantern at the cove bridge.

"Let 'em stay there all night," said Poole. "I shan't trouble 'em."

A few minutes later Wally swung the bow in toward his landing and together they carried the canoe up, turned it over, and left it for the night. Wally took his bicycle and started for home, divided in his mind between delight at the adventure and fear of the parental reception which he was to face. Poole ran beside him until they reached the Squamscott, and, when they parted, showered upon his head such expressions of gratitude as no little townie had ever received from a

baseball captain since ever baseball captains existed.

Wally's account of his adventures was the only excuse he had to offer for his absence to his reproachful parents. He had been over the whole narrative once, and was explaining more in detail about his hiding-place beside the rock, when a committee from the dining seniors appeared and craved the pleasure of Master Wally's company at the banquet. Mamma, of course, demurred, but Mr. Sedgwick opined that he might as well make a night of it, and the seniors bore him away in triumph. They planted him beside the recovered president, fed him royally on ice cream and cake, mentioned him in their speeches, and sent him home with a cheer at ten o'clock.

On the morrow Wally had no great appetite for breakfast, and he found his legs somewhat heavy as he trotted down to school — but he had great things to tell the boys!

CHAPTER XXII

A FAIR CHANCE

PATTERSON'S resolution to pitch no more except to Owen was speedily known in school and variously judged. Poole himself said little about it, thinking that the pitcher's rebellious attitude was caused by a temporary fit of discouragement which would soon pass away. Others were less charitable, particularly Borland's friends, who declared that Patterson was trying to shift upon Borland's shoulders the responsibility for his own poor work. Rob, likewise disapproving, upbraided him most frankly for disloyalty and insubordination; it was rank treason to refuse to do what one could for the cause just because the authorities did not select the team to suit him. Wasn't Rob himself playing in an entirely strange position because they wanted him there?

But Pat remained politely obdurate. "I suppose I'm all wrong," he concluded stubbornly

after Rob had instructed him in his duty with great emphasis and detail; "but if I am, it can't be helped, for I'm going to do what I said I would and nothing else. Either you catch me or I don't pitch. I don't see what treason there is in that. You know you're a better catcher than Borland, now, don't you?"

"No, I don't," retorted Owen, hotly. "If I were, they'd take me without your forcing them into it. You're just making a fool of me."

At this Patterson merely smiled and said nothing, and acted as if the judges had given a unanimous verdict in his favor. What can you do with a fellow who listens and grins like an idiot and won't argue, and yet refuses to be convinced? Rob gave him up.

But neither Poole nor Lyford could forget that first game in which the second team had so easily and so completely trounced the first. Explain it as they might, — as a freak of chance, as due to lucky hitting by two or three of the second, to temporary blindness of the batting eye on the part of the first, to O'Connell's wildness, — the fact still remained that Patterson had

pitched an excellent game and might do so again. Lyford therefore was inclined to yield a point; let Patterson practise with Owen, if he cherished the fancy that Owen was necessary to him. After a time they would try the pair in a game, and then, when it was shown that Owen did no better for him than Borland had done, he would drop the notion that he must depend on his catchers, and learn to depend on himself. So Owen continued to catch Patterson in practice, while Borland caught O'Connell and threw to bases; and after his catching practice Rob would go out and try his new position at right field.

The Dartmouth nine stopped at Seaton on its way to Boston and gave the schoolboys a game. It was early in the season for both teams, and neither was satisfied with the score. O'Connell was not hit hard by the collegians, but he gave several bases on balls; and when a Dartmouth runner got to first he had little difficulty in reaching second and third. The college players seemed to hit at necessary times, and when the base-runner tried to steal a base, either Borland received the ball in bad position to throw, or the

throw went high and wide; the runner was usually safe. The Seatonians, on the other hand, though they made nearly as many hits, were far behind in runs. Rob played at right field and accepted one easy chance; he also satisfied the authorities by making two hits. They were not so well satisfied with the six at the foot of the Seaton error column, and Lyford, at least, was not blind to the mistakes in judgment shown by the battery. But the school, which expected defeat from the college team, criticised leniently. They felt somewhat different two mornings later, when the papers reported the Dartmouth-Hillbury game, which the Hillburyites all but won.

Another week of training passed. Rob occasionally relieved Borland in throwing to bases now, and a new party had arisen on the bleachers, a party which asked persistently, "Why doesn't Owen catch?" The party was small, but its strength was considerably augmented by the cautious support of the four or five players of the infield whose duty it was to receive the catcher's throws. When Borland threw to second, he stepped back with one foot, at the same

time pulling back his arm, and with a violent swing of arm and body drove the ball down, as if it were thrown by a catapult. If it struck fair it struck hard, and fortunate was the baseman if he was braced to receive it. Rob's throw was different. He stepped forward instead of back, and his throw was with the arm alone, a quick, hard snap which ended with the wrist forward. The ball thus got an upward twist which lifted it just enough to counteract the force of gravity and to keep it parallel with the ground. A throw like this carries well and lands in the hands like a feather.

Hayes the shortstop and McPherson, who played at second, discovered immediately this difference between the balls thrown by the two catchers. After experience with Owen's easily taken snaps it was hard to go back to Borland's cannon balls.

"They are twice as easy to handle as Borland's," said Hayes, as he walked down with McPherson after the practice; "and you don't lose your balance trying to hold 'em, either."

"And as far as I can see they travel just as

fast," replied the second baseman, "or else he gets them off a lot quicker."

Lyford and Poole also noticed Owen's throwing and recognized his skill.

"He may beat Borland out after all," said the coach.

"There's a good deal more to catching than throwing to bases," Poole returned thoughtfully. "Borland has a lot of good points. He's a good backstop, is sure on fouls, and doesn't rattle; and he's used to our game. He was good last year and ought to be better this. I won't throw him over until I find some one surely better."

"I shouldn't, either," said the coach; "though, to tell the truth, I never thought him remarkable in inside work.[1] With green pitchers this year, a good deal will depend on what the catcher gets out of them."

The truth of this last remark was so obvious that no reply could be made to it except to assent, or perhaps to add as a corollary that, other things being equal, the best catcher was the one who

[1] The term applied to the catcher's strategy in directing the pitching.

could get the most out of the pitcher. Poole was an excellent ball player and a just captain. To put an inferior man on the nine because he was a friend or a fraternity mate would have been impossible for him. But Poole had a way of planning things in advance, and then trying hard to make his plans succeed. In this he was almost obstinate. Carle and Borland as the school battery had been an important part of his plan. When this scheme miscarried, he had fixed on O'Connell and Borland, or Patterson and Borland — always Borland. Owen, he had decided, should go to right field to make a part of the heavy-hitting outfield which he had dreamed of producing. The suggestion that Borland's strategy was faulty did not please him, because it interfered with his plans. At the same time, if there was some one better he wanted to know it.

"Well, let us try the other battery," said the coach, at last. And the captain agreed.

The opportunity came soon. After the Dartmouth game O'Connell complained of a lame arm and asked for a rest. Borland was laid off

with him. Patterson and Owen were slated for the next game.

The Fryeburg school was on the schedule for Saturday, and Poole was eager to win the game. The year before the manager had induced this team to come to Seaton to substitute for a nine which had been obliged to cancel its game. In the spirit of superiority which the boys of Seaton and Hillbury often assume toward the athletic teams of other schools, the Seaton manager had seen fit to urge upon the Fryeburg captain that he bring up his best team and give the Academy nine a good game. The Fryeburger had responded by bringing up so excellent a team, and giving the Seatonians so stiff a game, that the latter were supremely thankful for the base on balls, the three-base hit, and the muffed fly which yielded them their two runs to match against the seven which the visitors achieved. Seaton doesn't easily forget that kind of a surprise. Next to the great Hillbury contest, the climax of the athletic year, there was no game in the schedule which captain and school desired so ardently to win. This year these fellows must be soundly thrashed!

To his men Poole appeared most confident as he ordered them to their places for the opening of the game. He tried to persuade himself that he really felt all the hopefulness he showed, but it was harder to deceive himself than to encourage other people. If there was another whose manner and words helped to stay the captain's courage, it was the new catcher. Owen had long ago learned that as the catcher's every movement is watched by the eight men before him in the field, so his whole bearing and his work are both in a marked degree either encouraging or discouraging to the rest of the nine. He must never show faint-heartedness or uncertainty. He must do hard things as if they were easy, must keep the whole play always before his eyes, direct the pitcher, watch the base-runner, throw instantly when necessary, take hard knocks with indifference, sprint for sudden fouls,—this and more is involved in the work of his position; but above all and everywhere he must have courage and inspire it.

Rob could do this because he had done it many times before, and because he trusted his

infield. He had arranged with Ames at first for the throwing signal, with Hayes, the shortstop, and McPherson, second, as to covering second base; they were trusty men. Patterson was in good condition, asking nothing better than to follow the catcher's directions. Poole had given him from his last year's note-book certain facts about the Fryeburg hitters. It was just such an opportunity as this that Rob had longed for. Why shouldn't he feel confidence?

The three Fryeburg batters were soon disposed of, one striking out, one putting up a pop foul, which Durand found easy to handle, and the third catching a wide out on the end of his bat and rolling a grounder to Ames. When Seaton came to the bat, McPherson, perceiving that Simms, the Fryeburg pitcher, was nervous, waited patiently and went to first on balls; and Poole, a little later, put a clean hit over the shortstop's head. With two men on bases things seemed promising, but Sudbury struck out, Durand forced McPherson by a hit to third base, and Owen, to his great disappointment, sent a long fly into the centre fielder's hands.

In the second inning nothing was accomplished by either side. In the third a Fryeburger got first, only to be caught napping there on the first pitch by a sharp throw from the catcher, which called out from the well-filled benches the clear staccato "individual" cheer, "Owen, rah! Owen, rah! rah, rah, rah, Owen!" Rob might have appreciated the compliment if he had not been so intent on his work. A ball close in by a timid batsman drove him away from the plate; the next starting in apparently the same course, curved over; the third was the swift jump which Patterson threw as naturally as a left-hander throws an inshoot; the fourth, a teasing slow ball which made the third strike. Then with an easy fly to Rorbach, who was taking Owen's place in right field, the side was out.

McPherson came to the bat again and sent a liner over second base. Poole, who was an experienced bunter, tapped a weak bounder along the line to third, and, being a left-hander and quick, beat the ball to first. Sudbury struck out again. Durand drove a ball toward the second baseman which that fielder found too

hot to manage, and the bases were full. Owen waited patiently until three balls were called, and then cracked another out into the field between right and centre, and two men came home. Ames hit a long fly to centre field, on which Durand scored. Then Hayes and Patterson went meekly out.

In the first half of the fourth Fryeburg got a run on a hit and errors by Durand and Patterson. From then until the eighth no more runs were made. Fryeburg reached first base thrice and second but once, and Seaton fared little better. After Larkin, the Fryeburg shortstop, essaying to steal second, ran into the ball in McPherson's hands a good three yards from the base, the Fryeburg base-runner clung to first if once he reached there, and waited for some one else to help him along. Patterson was following his catcher's signals like clockwork. Pitchers have days when the ball works with them, and this was Patterson's day. His jump balls really jumped; his inside ones cut the corners of the plate; into the straight, swift balls he put a powerful body swing. The fellows on the benches,

the anxious captain, the critical coach, all felt the spirit that prevailed, perceived that the men were playing a game worth while, and were elated.

Then in the eighth came the events that caused the sympathetic spectators first to grieve, then to revile their foolish optimism, and finally in one big howl, that carried fully half a mile, to pour forth their new emotions. It happened in this wise.

Lufkin, the first Fryeburg batsman, hit a long fly to Sudbury, who dropped it, thus presenting the runner with a two-base hit. Morris, who followed him, hit the ball in a low arch over third baseman's head, and reached first. The next Fryeburger hit to Hayes, who, in overhaste, threw home, while Lufkin stayed at third. No one out and the bases full! Poole stamped his spikes into the ground, rubbed his bare hand nervously into his glove, and asked himself with sinking heart whether Patterson wasn't going up in the air.

"One ball!" cried the umpire on the next pitch. Owen walked toward the pitcher's box

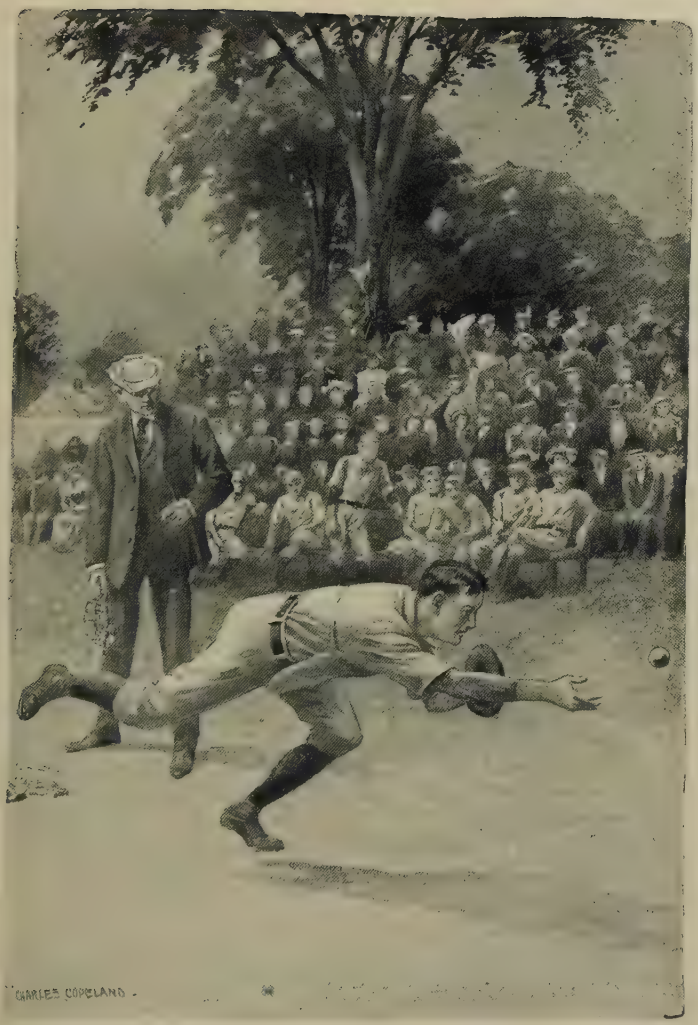
and said a few words to Patterson as he tossed him the ball at short range. Patterson nodded and went back. Owen stooped on the plate and tied his shoe, readjusted his glove, and took his position once more. The batsman struck, lifting the ball in a low pop foul hardly a dozen feet above the catcher's head.

"Over your head!" shouted Patterson.

In an instant Rob had turned, flipped the mask from his head, looked up and caught sight of the ball. It was already falling, two yards ahead of him! He leaped, as a football player makes a flying tackle, and clutched the falling object hardly a foot from the ground.

One out! but the three bases were still full. Patterson had calmed down. Ross, the Fryeburg catcher, usually struck over the ball; Patterson sent him a low one. The bat clipped the top of the ball and drove it into Patterson's hands.

"Here!" cried Rob, standing on the plate. Patterson threw, Rob received the ball, turned and cut it to Ames at first, where it beat the runner by ten feet. Not till they saw Rob toss aside his mitt and Ames and Patterson start



HE LEAPED AND CLUTCHED THE BALL HARDLY A FOOT FROM THE GROUND. — *Page 250.*

in, did the crowd realize that Lufkin had been forced at the plate and Ross thrown out at first.

After that the game was no longer in danger — nor the battery's reputation. In the ninth the Seatonians made a rally and batted in four runs. So that the final score of seven to one represented a very fair vengeance for the defeat of the preceding year.

CHAPTER XXIII

A TIE GAME

Robert Owen received many attentions from enthusiastic schoolmates that afternoon. They hovered around him while he was dressing; they dropped in on him after he reached his room. But it was Patterson who got the credit for the pitching performance; and Rob, you may be sure, let fall no hint that would lessen the pitcher's glory. It was encouragement that Pat needed to bring out the best that was in him; he was getting it now in full measure.

But after all, the voluble flatteries of the ignorant were of little value to Rob compared with the opinions of captain and coach. They accosted him on his way up from the gymnasium, just where he had met them three weeks earlier, after the game between the First and Second.

"Well, Owen," began the coach, "it was a great game you caught to-day."

Rob's modest smile and quiet "Thank you" represented but poorly the delight he felt.

"I really was surprised at Patterson's work," went on Lyford. "I didn't imagine he could do so well. It looked as though he was going up in the eighth, but you pulled him down handily. You played in luck there, too, for it isn't often that a man is forced at the plate."

"How much of that pitching did Patterson really do?" demanded Poole, abruptly.

Rob glanced keenly at the captain. "All of it," he answered quickly. "It was good pitching, too. The ball came right where it was wanted."

"But you ran the thing, didn't you?"

"Why, yes, in a way. When I called for a ball he put it over as I wanted it unless he had something better. He usually took my suggestions."

Lyford nodded agreement. "There should be but one head in a battery," he said, "and it's my opinion that if you've got a good, wideawake catcher, it's better to let him do the headwork."

"We've decided to keep Rorbach at right," said Poole. "You're too valuable a man to

waste in the outfield. And you may as well go on catching Patterson."

Rob scampered ecstatically up to his room. There is nothing like a victory which you have worked and waited and longed for through months of discouragement, and, finally, in spite of every obstacle, actually won. This day's work had brought the authorities over to his side. After this there could be no more taking for granted that the old catcher must be the best catcher, and that experience elsewhere must be inferior to that acquired at Seaton. Borland was on the defensive now; if he would hold his place, he must prove his claim to it. And to do that he must accomplish something more than make a steady backstop and occasionally catch a man at second. Rob chuckled aloud as he recalled Poole's question about running the pitcher. Twice only in the game had Patterson ventured to pitch a ball different from what his catcher had called for. One of these had been fouled close to the line; and the other — a straight over after two strikes and a ball, which Pat had tried in hopes of a quick strike-out — the batter had smashed to centre field for two

bases. As a strategist, Patterson could be improved upon, but it certainly was not the catcher's business to say so, especially as Pat had vowed that afternoon after the two-bagger that he'd never interfere again.

Then the congratulating friends began to drop in — Lindsay, Laughlin, Duncan Peck, Strong, Ware, Hendry, Salter. Simmons appeared in the midst of the bustle and retired shyly into a corner, whence he looked on at the demonstration with smiling but silent approval. He evidently had something on his mind. Duncan Peck also showed himself unusually subdued; and though he had that day been permitted to remove from his door the hateful inscription "Duncan Peck, Study Hours, 8–1, 4–6, 8 P.M.—" which had adorned it these four months, he yet manifested no exuberance of joy at his freedom.

The visitors went their ways before dinner-time, leaving to Simmons his opportunity. "I didn't go to the game —" he began, as if about to excuse himself for disloyalty.

"Up the river again with Payner?" asked Rob, smiling.

Simmons nodded.

"Have a good time?"

"Fine! Up the river, Payner's very different from what he is here. He's as jolly as can be, and tells you lots of things."

"Well, what's the matter, then? What makes you look glum?"

"I'll tell you. When we got home he took me into his room to show me a new specimen. Then he asked me what the Pecks were going to do about the plagues, and I told him that there wasn't any change so far as I'd heard. At that he looked fierce, and said they'd get the full number then; they'd better look out, for he'd put them to the bad before he got through with them. Then he asked me if I didn't want to see what the next one was going to be. I said Yes, and he unlocked the closet door and let me look in. What do you think I saw?"

Simmons paused and gazed at Owen with big, horrified eyes.

"Well, what was it?" demanded the ball player. "I'm not going to guess through the whole zoölogy. Spit it out, can't you?"

"In the back of the closet was a kind of wire-covered box like a big rat trap, and in the box was an awfully big, shiny, black snake, all coiled up!"

"Dead?" asked Owen.

"Alive!"

"How did you know?"

"I saw it move its head, and the eyes shone, and there was food for it sticking through the wires."

"That's about the limit!" exclaimed Rob. "What then?"

"He pulled me out and locked the door, and said, as quietly as if he were talking about a common *bug*, that he was going to wait a day or two and see if they were coming round. If they didn't, he'd give 'em the snake; he didn't know how yet, but they'd surely get it. Then he wanted me to promise not to let on about it to any one."

"Did you promise?"

Simmons straightened up. "No, I didn't," he declared proudly. "I just let him know what I thought of him and cleared out!"

"You told Duncan about it, didn't you?" asked Rob.

"Yes; how did you know?"

"I could see it in his face when he was here a few minutes ago. You'd better not worry over it. Payner wouldn't put a snake like that into their room."

"Oh, yes, he would," answered Simmons, wisely, with a doleful shake of his head. "You don't know that fellow. He's all right if you let him alone; but when he's mad, he's terrible. Why, he doesn't care any more for a snake like that than I do for an angleworm!"

It was nearly time for dinner, and as both preferred to be on hand at Alumni when the doors were opened, the conversation came to an end. Rob half resolved to have a serious talk with the Pecks that evening and see if he could not induce them to put an end to the unseemly feud. But after dinner he was unexpectedly called to a baseball meeting, and after that there were two lessons to prepare; so it happened that with his work and his natural weariness from the game, and the excitement of his new prospects, he for-

got completely the Pecks and Payner and the snake.

But Duncan did not forget. He was thoroughly sick of the whole affair. Of what use was it to be off study hours, if one must forever be watching and dodging and locking up, never free from fear and never able to placate the enemy? Why must he suffer because Don was a mule? And the big snake! He shuddered at the thought of the coiling, crawling thing. He began to see it in the dark corners, to hear it in the rustle of papers on the floor. It was like a waking nightmare.

By evening he was ready for a decisive step. He went resolutely to Payner's room and made a complete apology. Payner listened and nodded approval. "I thought it was about time you fellows came down off your perch," he said. "Next time perhaps you won't be in such a hurry to roughhouse a new fellow. It's all right now as far as you've gone; but where's the other one of you?"

"My apology will do for both, won't it?"

"No, sir!" returned Payner, with decision. "You've both got to toe the scratch and say

your little pieces, or it's no go. Two or nothing. Send along your brother with the same story, and then mebbe I'll call off the dogs."

"I will if I can," replied Duncan, dismally.

It was a badly discouraged lad who sneaked back to the Peck quarters and threw himself on his couch. It was no use. Don would never yield. He might fight, or get up a counter demonstration, but apologize — never. Duncan lay for some time on his back, throwing his knife into the air and catching it again. This process always had a soothing effect. It also served to clarify his thoughts and stir his imagination. After half an hour's practice with mind and hand, a new idea dawned upon him.

Pocketing his knife with a slap, Duncan pulled open the closet door and fumbled among the garments hung thick upon the crowded hooks. Yes, there was Donald's variegated waistcoat which he had been sporting of late, and which, in the excitement of the morning's scramble for breakfast and chapel, he had mourned his inability to find. Duncan stowed it away in a corner under a box, where only a thorough over-

hauling of the contents of the closet could bring it to light; then much easier in mind he took up the work of the evening.

On the next morning there was another burst of sputtering on the part of Donald, for this time his flat-topped gray hat, adorned with the hatband of the fraternity which he had recently joined, had likewise disappeared. He could find it nowhere, although he stole four minutes for the search from the short allowance for breakfast, and notwithstanding Duncan's remarkably unselfish assistance. A cap was near at hand, however, and taking this, Donald at length hurried over to the dining hall, vowing to complain to Dr. Mann downstairs that Lady Jane was swiping his things.

For two hours at least he could not execute his threat, for at eight came Greek, and at nine Rushers' Math. Duncan, who was in the Flunkers' section, recited an hour later, and thus was free between nine and ten. Once the "nine o'clocks" were well under way, Duncan arrayed himself in his brother's favorite necktie, donned the resplendent waistcoat, fished out the flat-topped

hat with its striking hatband from beneath his bureau, and giving to the brim the rakish tilt which Donald affected, put it carefully upon his head. Thus panoplied he rapped confidently on Payner's door.

"I've come to see you about that room business," began Duncan, looking down at the hat which he held in front of him, and yet in such a way that the waistcoat was largely visible.

Payner had risen from his chair. "So you're the other one, are you? Well, what do you want?"

"Didn't you send for me?" asked the visitor.

"No, I didn't," retorted Payner, sharply. "I said I wouldn't receive any apology until you both came."

"Well, I'm ready to apologize," announced the Peck. "I'm very sorry we did it."

This was a true word if Duncan had ever spoken such! His tones were likewise sincere. Payner, who at present sought victory rather than vengeance, and was not at heart bloodthirsty, felt immediately mollified. "How did you happen to do it?" he asked. "I'd never done anything to you fellows."

"Well, you see, you put the Moons wise about their room, and we thought you'd no business to butt in. We didn't hurt the Moons any. It did them lots of good."

"It didn't do me any good," replied Payner, significantly.

"Nor us," said Duncan, with his eyes on the floor.

There was a brief silence which the visitor found most irksome. "Is that enough?" he asked.

"I guess so," responded Payner. "I don't believe you'll be troubled by any more plagues."

"Thank you," said Duncan, humbly; "and I hope you won't say much about the affair. It would be pretty tough to have all the fellows guying us."

Payner grinned. "That's a good deal to ask, but I shan't talk about it if you don't."

Five seconds later, with the door of his own room safely closed behind him, Duncan was laughing and capering and tossing his brother's show hat into the air, and rolling on the couch in the gorgeous waistcoat. Presently, however,

he bethought himself that time was passing, threw the hat under the sofa, hung the waistcoat in the closet under Donald's light overcoat, and returned the borrowed necktie to the drawer. Then, after resuming his regular costume, he stole forth to waylay Donald after the latter's recitation and inform him that a hat which looked like his was lying under the sofa, and that if he would take the trouble to remove the top layer of garments in the closet he might find his vest. It was with real regret that he refrained from rehearsing certain events of the morning, but the usually appreciative twin was the last person of whom in this case he could make a confidant.

Toward noon Duncan, who was bursting with his secret, espied Owen coming up the stairs, and forthwith haled him into his room. "I say, Bobby, what do you think has happened?" he demanded eagerly.

Rob glanced around the room. "Another plague, I suppose," he said, "though I don't see any signs of it. You look pretty happy for a fellow who's been seeing snakes."

"No snakes and no more plagues!" cried Duncan, gleefully.

"How's that?" demanded Owen.

"We've come to terms. From now on Mr. Payner and we are friends. He's a great fellow for bugs, but when you really want help in time of need, just call on old Odysseus!" Whereupon he slapped himself on the chest and his visitor on the back and danced around the table. Later, after trying to exact a pledge of secrecy, he told his story with much detail and scrollwork; and finally he stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat and strutted up and down before his visitor, declaring that if he was not as great as Cicero who saved a state, he was at least the equal of the infant Hercules who killed a snake, and certainly greater than Laocoön, who let the snakes do him up. The sudden arrival of Donald threw the actor into some confusion.

An hour later Rob sat at his table staring vacantly at an open book, and musing on the adventures of the Peck family. A knock at the door was followed by the appearance of Payner on the threshold.

"Simmons out?" asked the caller, laconically.

"Yes," Rob replied. "What's up?"

"Oh, nothing. I just wanted to tell him he needn't worry any more about that snake. I suppose he told you about it?" he added with a shrewd grin.

"Yes, he did."

"I knew he would. And he told the Pecks too?"

Rob laughed but said nothing.

"Oh, he told them all right. You needn't pretend he didn't. I knew he would, or I shouldn't have shown him the thing. I meant him to tell them."

"You really wouldn't have put that snake in their room!" said Rob, severely.

"Why not? It wasn't alive."

"A dead snake wouldn't be much better than a live one."

"It wasn't dead either," chuckled Payner. "It was made of an old black necktie stuffed, with glass eyes, and its head worked with a string. I got it up to scare the Pecks through Simmons. I knew he'd go and tell them just as soon as he

saw it, and I thought that would bring 'em round. You see, the plague business was playing out, anyway. The last time I tried it the housekeeper came pretty near getting on to it, and I didn't dare take any more risks. And yet if I stopped without getting the apology, they'd have me beaten! So I tried this scheme, and won out. They've both apologized."

"I see," said Rob. As a matter of fact, he did not see, for he was trying to determine for himself who had outwitted the other.

"Just tell Simmons I've given up my plan of the snake, won't you?" said Payner, turning to go with the air of a victor. "And don't let on about the rest of it. I shouldn't want it to get back to the Pecks."

For some seconds Rob sat looking blankly at the door through which the self-satisfied face of Payner had just disappeared. Then he threw back his head and laughed loud and long.

CHAPTER XXIV

MAKING READY

In the next Wednesday's game, O'Connell and Borland composed the school battery, and on the following Saturday, Patterson and Owen. O'Connell won his game; Patterson lost his. And none the less, after the second game, Poole let it be definitely known that Patterson and Owen were now considered the regular battery. This decision was not based on the scores.

O'Connell won his game because he played against an inferior team, whose pitcher the Seaton men could hit. Patterson lost an uphill game against a clever pitcher whom his men could do little with, while the Seaton players behind him failed to support him at critical moments. O'Connell's friends maintained that the results of the two games showed the comparative merits of the pitchers. Lyford and Poole took the opposite

view. Patterson at two several points had saved his game when there were men on third and second with but one out. It was lost in the seventh, after a two-base hit and an error had put men on first and third, and another error permitted one of them to reach the home plate; but the very play through which the game was lost enhanced Owen's reputation. It happened thus: —

With members of the visiting team on first and third, and one man out, Rob, who had analyzed a similar situation more than once before, made up his mind that the man on first base would try to steal at the earliest opportunity; first, because against a school team like Seaton there was more than an even chance that a double steal would rattle the catcher and bring in a run; secondly, because a single with men on second and third would yield two runs, while if the man remained at first it would score but one. So Rob signalled to his infield, and called on Patterson for a wide, unreachable out. The ball came true, while the runner on first started hard down, and Rob snapped in a straight line for second, which Hayes ran to cover; but McPherson, who had his eye

on the runner at third, seeing him start for home, ran in behind Patterson, cut off Owen's throw to second, and shot the ball back home. So far the play had been perfectly carried out.

Unhappily, however, its very perfection interfered with its success. Rob and McPherson had done their work so rapidly that the base-runner was only about halfway between third and home when Rob received the ball at the plate. The runner stopped and turned back. Rob ran down toward him and threw to Durand. The man doubled again, and Durand—trusty, capable, but over-eager Durand—returned the ball about a foot above Owen's reach, while Patterson, who should have been backing up the catcher in the line behind, stood halfway over from his box gazing fascinated at the play.

So at the same time the game was lost and the catcher glorified—at least in the eyes of those who knew what it meant to have a man behind the bat who could keep the game in hand, recognize opportunities when they came, and perform his part in the plays. Poole and Lyford belonged to this number, and most of the members of the nine.

Poole was inclined to be obstinate, and he disliked to be proved wrong; but when once satisfied that he was wrong, he turned promptly and finally about. From this time forth there was no more uncertainty about the catcher in Poole's mind. He was for Owen through and through, without wavering or question. Borland must give way to a better man.

But there were many who could not follow the captain in his change of view; who, in fact, could see no sufficient reason why the old catcher who had proved himself competent should be laid aside for a new man. The "inside work" of a catcher is not apparent to the occupants of the bleachers; they cannot measure accurately the comparative merits of two men playing in different games; they do not count assists. When Borland made his three-base hit in a game in which his battery played, his friends made sarcastic comment: "That's the man who couldn't hit well enough for the First!" When in the next game Patterson pitched an in instead of the out that was called for, and Owen, after losing time in getting the ball still tried to catch the runner at second, and sent

a short bound at McPherson's toes, the same critics added: "— and that's the star thrower who put poor Jack out of play. The old man could do better than that with his eyes shut!" These, let it be understood, were Borland's friends. Borland himself never said a word.

The Hillbury game drew on apace, and the nine settled to its work. The play was improving; the infield was coming, quick and true, the men trusting each other and working well together under the catcher's direction. Patterson had learned to value himself aright. Throughout the school the doubters had grown fewer as the days went by. Poole paid no attention at all to them, but Rob knew of their existence and understood full well how their number would be suddenly multiplied by ten if he should disappoint the hopes of the school in the great game. To lose a Hillbury game is a calamity; the single man who loses it by a single error is unforgivable.

And yet to win under the circumstances seemed more than the school had a right to expect. There had never been a poor nine in Hillbury since school nines began to be. This year the blue team was

largely veteran, with the identical pitcher who had last year mown down the Seaton hitters as a well-aimed bowling ball clears away the pins from their triangle. The scores of the nines which had played with the two school teams compared unfavorably for Poole's team. Patterson, a mere green apprentice, was a wholly uncertain quantity. Such considerations fairly weighed gave little promise to the Seatonians; but in the Seaton breast hope springs eternal, and a game may always be won until it is actually lost.

A week before the game, the whole school journeyed to Hillbury for the track meet. Before the contests both sides had counted probabilities. According to Seaton reckoning, if Rohrer beat Royce in the high hurdles, and Benton won the half mile, and Laughlin and Lindsay took seven out of eight points in the shot-put, Seaton would have twelve points to spare. By Hillbury count, only accidents could keep the blue from beating the red by at least twenty. Each side regarded the results as ominous for the more important contest of the following Saturday.

And that was why Seaton took the defeat so

to heart. Rohrer did beat Royce in the hurdles, and Laughlin and Lindsay won their seven points; but there were unexpected offsets, and Benton did not even get a place in the half-mile. Six points is not a bad defeat, but any defeat is bad when you expect victory. If omens counted, the ball game was as good as lost.

But Owen's hopes never wavered. He had seen hard games before, games which he had won and games which he had lost; and never had he felt such a spirit of keenness and unity as animated this raw Seaton nine. If Hillbury beat them, Hillbury must play good ball, far better ball than any team which had come that season to Seaton. If only Patterson kept up!

On the Friday before the great day, as the decorations were blossoming out on the houses, and in recitations the game was crowding the lesson matter hard for possession of the minds of the pupils, Poole and Owen were hailed from across the street by Wally.

"Hello, Wally," called Poole, "come over here!"

The boy hastened across.

"Could you get us the seats?" asked Wally.

"Only two," said Poole, "and you'll have to let your father and sister have those."

Wally's countenance fell.

"But as you helped me out of a scrape once, I'm going to pay you back. I'm going to let you have a seat on the players' bench."

"On the players' bench!" cried the delighted lad. "Great Scott! do you mean it?"

Poole laughed and nodded.

"You've got to bring us luck," said Owen.

"Oh, I will," returned the boy, "but you don't need it. You're going to win anyway. I've got my red fire all ready."

"I wish I felt as he does," said Poole, as the boy scampered across the street to inform his friends of his good fortune.

"I do," replied Owen, promptly.

CHAPTER XXV

AS WALLY SAW IT

PROUD as a king, and happy as a king rarely is, Wally sat on the players' bench and stared at the throngs pouring in through the entrances and flooding the seats. On the fence over by the woods, like sparrows crowded close on a telegraph wire, was strung a line of twittering and jostling youngsters, let in by a wise manager who preferred to have them safely quiet inside rather than uproariously disorderly without. And every one of the shrill flock sooner or later fastened his eyes on Wally and demanded the reason for their comrade's elevation to the company of the gods.

Such a question must, of course, be answered. Whether the answer is correct or not is of minor consequence. Some said Wally was a mascot; others that Poole was sweet on his sister; while still others were able to give melodramatic accounts of Wally's rescue of the captain from the

desperate gang of upper middlers who had "pinched" him. While the argument on these points was going forward, the advance scouts of the fence brigade discovered signs of the arrival of the nines, and Skinny Flick, waving his tattered cap, led a high-pitched imitation of the long Seaton cheer, weirdly shrill and yet true and even and united.

"How can those little boys do it so well?" asked Margaret Sedgwick, amused at the unexpected prelude.

"Practised it, I suppose," replied Mr. Sedgwick, indifferently.

And Wally not being on hand to set forth the true relations of things, Miss Margaret accepted her father's explanation, and gave the soprano cheerers full credit for patriotic forethought. As a matter of fact their facility had been as unconsciously acquired as the street ragtime which a dignified adult is shocked to find himself whistling. The Seaton urchin begins to hear the school cheers as soon as his legs are strong enough to take him where students gather or heroes battle. Classes pass before him as the generations of men

before the aged Nestor. There were boys on that fence who could already have repeated the Seaton battle cries when fellows who were now leaders of elevens and nines in Yale and Harvard and Princeton and Dartmouth had just set foot in the Seaton streets. The gamin's term of instruction is long; so the cheer from the fence had the true ring.

It was likewise well timed. A minute later the four cheer-leaders on the Seaton side were swinging their arms and swaying their bodies in a convulsion of energy, as they led in the first great welcome to their team; while at the heels of the Seaton players came the Hillbury nine, waking into enthusiasm the whole solid phalanx of blue. And here unquestionably was the first evil omen for Seaton hopes. Every Hillbury student produced a megaphone and turned it toward the Seaton side; the volume of Hillbury's cheer was multiplied by three. What a handicap! What a depressing evidence of Hillbury superiority!

But something more than noise was necessary to depress Wally; his optimism was not to be extinguished by megaphones. The Seaton players went out for their preliminary practice. Lyford

batted to the outfield, Borland to the in-; Rob stood at the plate, caught the returns, and joined in the cross-diamond throwing. Lyford was directing the practice, but even Wally could see how the infield followed the catcher's leading and instinctively looked for his suggestion. Nor was this remarkable. The players were feeling the strain of the situation. Sudbury had just missed an easy fly that he ought to have held; Hayes had made a bad mess of a grounder; Durand had sent a ball to first that had defied Ames's long reach. Nervousness was in the air, but Owen stood smiling and steady, taking the balls with an easy grace that had in it no sign of ostentation, throwing straight and swift, cheering into confidence by his very presence and attitude. "We've got an awfully good catcher, anyway," thought Wally, proudly, as he squirmed on the seat and tried at the same time to watch all the Seaton fielders, and the Hillbury players tossing the ball to and fro near their bench, and the two captains talking with the umpire.

Presently Hillbury took the field and Wally now had a harder task, for there were the Hillbury

men to be observed and compared with their predecessors, while Patterson was warming up with Owen over by the backstop, and must have sympathetic attention. Rob had borrowed Ames's mitt to use as a plate, and over this Patterson was pitching, unsteady at first with the tension of the strange conditions, but soon settling down under Owen's soothing guidance. When Rob found that his pitcher had himself sufficiently in hand to be able to place the ball pretty accurately over one side of the mitt or the other, he called to him to stop.

"You're all right, Pat!" he declared, dropping his arm on his companion's shoulder as they walked back to join their mates on the bench. "It's all there; you'll pitch your best game to-day. Don't hurry now, and don't worry; and don't forget to back up first whenever you can get over there."

Patterson nodded; there was nothing for him to say. He was content to leave the results in Owen's hands.

"We go out!" announced Poole, coming up with a smile on his face. "All ready, Pat?"

Patterson gave a sign of assent. "Yes, he's

ready," said Owen. "Here's your mitt, Ames. This is one of the days when we can cut it every time."

The Hillbury players came in, the Seatonians scattered to their positions. The supporters cheered for their school and their captain; then for the captain of the other team. 'Tis a fine custom of the Seaton-Hillbury rivalry which the colleges might well imitate. The Hillbury megaphones bellowed a response. The umpire threw down a new white ball which Patterson coolly scrubbed in the dirt outside the box, while Michael, the head of the Hillbury batting list, took his place by the plate. The game was on!

Owen crouched and signalled with his fingers between his knees. Patterson answered with an out that threatened to strike Michael on the shoulder, but swung in over the inside of the plate. The batsman stepped back and the umpire called a strike. The next one was high and wide and out of reach; Michael did not bite. One ball! For the third effort Patterson stepped to the left and threw a swift one that cut the inside corner of the plate at an angle — or would have cut it,

if it had been allowed to take its course. Michael struck at it and knocked it into Patterson's hands. Long Ames had the ball before Michael was halfway down the line.

Hood, the Hillbury shortstop, who had been standing by, swinging two bats like a professional, now strode up, thumped the ground with his chosen stick, and looked valiantly at the pitcher. The first ball, a drop, he struck at and fouled. The second he misjudged and let go by. "Strike Two!" The third and fourth were tempters which he resisted. Then came one which he fancied. With sudden impulse he struck hard at it, but even as he struck, the ball slammed in Owen's trusty mitt.

A strike out! Two men gone! The Seaton cheer-leaders were busy again, and with contorted faces and fierce arm swings goaded on their company of howlers. Hillbury answered with a blast of megaphones, as Coy, their centre fielder, appeared at the plate. The first ball pitched appealed to him; he struck at it and sent a low bounder toward third. For just an instant Durand juggled it and then threw straight to Ames,

but Coy was fast and the umpire called him safe.

Kleindienst, the Hillbury captain, came up, eager to make a hit that would help the runner round the bases. Thanks to Poole's note-book, and information gathered from many sources, Owen knew what to call for. The first pitch was a swift breast-high ball off the inner corner of the plate; Kleindienst smote and smote in vain. "Now Coy will steal," thought Rob, and signalled for an out. Coy did steal and Kleindienst tried to hit at the same time, but all he succeeded in accomplishing was to catch the ball on the end of his bat and drive it in easy bounds to Ames, making the third out.

"You've got to get a hit, Mac," said Poole, as McPherson picked up his bat. "Don't bite at the teasers. Make 'em put 'em over!"

Now McPherson meant to do that very thing, but the first one was so plausible that even though it wasn't just what he wanted, McPherson could not resist the temptation to try it. The result was a pop foul that Kleindienst gathered in off third base.

Poole was second on the list, and Poole waited; one ball! two balls! a foul! three balls! two strikes! At the next Poole dropped his bat and started for first, and the umpire did not say him nay.

And now it was Owen's turn to face O'Brien, and he tried to sacrifice, but the bunt rolled over the line, and his attempt came to naught. O'Brien was careful now, and gave him high balls that he could not bunt, and kept them well out of his reach. Two had been called balls and one a strike, when Rob's chance came. The ball was a trifle too far in, but he drew back a little as he struck, and drove a liner over second baseman's head out into the ground between centre and right. Poole went to third, and Rob was safe at second.

It was Rorbach's turn. He knew what he was expected to do without the spur implied in the sudden roar of greeting from the benches, followed by tense, expectant silence. O'Brien sought to work him with seductive outs, but Rorbach waited. Three balls and one strike brought the pitcher to reason; he couldn't afford to pass a

man with two on bases. So Rorbach got one where he could hit it, and lifted the ball in a splendid long arch far out into right field. The cheerleaders caught their breath and, forgetful of their duties, silently watched it fly. Was it a home run? It would have been if some one else than Furness had guarded the Hillbury right field. Furness started almost as soon as the ball, and racing backward toward the fence, turned as the ball was just going over his head and pulled it down. Rorbach was out, but Poole came home easily on the throw-in, and Owen wisely paused at third.

Long Ames now appeared at the plate, brandishing his bat in the clumsy fashion which had aroused so much merriment along the benches in that first game of the season. No one made merry over it to-day. The anxious Hillburyites thought only of the possibility of another hit, while the Seatonians' hopes now hung on the derided man's bat. And Ames, who cared nothing whether they derided or not, fixed his eyes on the pitcher and waited. One he let go by without offering at it; the second he fouled; the next proved a second ball, the fourth another strike. Still he waited,

clutching his bat a hand's-breadth from the end, with his lank figure bent awkwardly forward toward the plate. The fifth pitch was to his liking; with a short, quick stroke he chopped the ball in a safe little liner over third baseman's head, and galloped away to first, while Owen gleefully trotted home. Then Durand went out on an infield hit, and the first inning was over.

Such luck, of course, could not last, but the exhilaration engendered by these two runs carried the Seaton players safely through several innings. The second, with the tail-end of the list at bat on either side, was quickly over. In the third Poole led off with a hit, reaching second on an error, but got no farther. In the fourth sprinter Coy got to first on balls, but was thrown out by two yards when he tried to steal second; and the Hillbury captain, after making a clean hit, was forced at second by Webster's unlucky drive to Hayes, which resulted in a double play. By this time O'Brien had settled down into his best gait, and his best Poole's company found far too good.

On the other hand, Hillbury seemed to be finding Patterson less puzzling. The Seaton fielders

had work a-plenty. In the sixth Poole ran far back for a long fly from Michael's bat, cutting off what to the uproarious rooters on the Hillbury side seemed surely a three-base hit; and Hood's hard liner, that promised almost as much, was gloriously taken just inside third by Durand. The third Hillburyite hit over Ames's head, and reached second only to be left there when his successor was retired on a foul fly. The Seatonians in their turn went tamely out in order; not a single one reached first.

A thrill of apprehension passed through the ranks of red and gray as Webster opened the seventh with a slow grounder to Hayes, which the Seaton shortstop fumbled. Two runs are not great margin when a heavy-hitting team opens up on a pitcher, especially if that pitcher be, like Patterson, comparatively inexperienced. A couple of good hits, with an error or two and a base on balls, would quickly wipe out the slight advantage. Only steady playing and the steadiest kind of pitching could save the game, if the Hillbury sluggers showed themselves at all equal to their reputation. So thought many a timid

Seaton sympathizer, whose hopes of victory had been excited by the success of the first inning. Wally was not of these doubters. He knew full well that a man who reaches first does not necessarily reach second or third. Webster was at first; the only question was how and where he was to be stopped.

Now Wally did not see Owen signal to Ames, nor recognize the object of the swift, wide ball which Patterson next threw; but he did see Owen's arm come back like a spring and snap instantly forward; he likewise saw Ames gather in the ball and swing with it suddenly on Webster, who was leaping back to first; and he understood well the gesture by which the umpire called Webster in. The Seaton crowd shouted with unexpected joy, but Wally's surprise was only partial; he had expected to see the runner thrown out at second.

Then Ribot struck under one of Patterson's jumps and sent the ball far up in the air. Rob snatched off his mask and watched the returning sphere, relieved to see it descending on McPherson's side of second. Ribot was out, and O'Brien

brought the inning to a close by giving Durand a chance at another pop fly.

The Seaton hitters had no better luck. Hayes got his base on balls, but Patterson forced him at second, and was himself put out on the play, while McPherson flied out. Here was little encouragement for those who looked for more Seaton runs!

Furness started the eighth with a drive past second, which by bounding over Sudbury's shoulder enabled the runner to make two bases. Rounds, the last man of the Hillbury list, was counted an easy victim, but instead of striking out as he was expected to do, he hit the ball over Durand's head. Poole got it back in season to cut off any attempt at crossing the plate, but the awful fact remained that with only two runs needed to tie the score, Hillbury had men on first and third, with no one out and the heavy hitters coming on. A double now would bring in two men. Even Wally acknowledged to himself that he did not see how they were going to get out of that hole, while the dubious on the Seaton benches were sadly thinking that the game was lost. The fatal eighth was here!

A ball! two balls! Then Michael's bat cracked and the ball shot toward Hayes, struck well, and bounded into his hands. He gave but a glance at third — where Furness was lingering, hoping to draw a hasty throw to the plate, and so get Michael safely to first — then threw to McPherson, who had covered second. Rounds was thus forced out. Meantime Furness had made a late start for home, trusting to McPherson's slowness and probable confusion. But McPherson, who was neither slow nor confused, sent the ball directly to the plate, where Owen received it safely. Furness, while still ten feet away, stopped and wheeled about; but Owen ran him down, then turned sharply, steadied himself, and drove the ball with all his strength to McPherson. Michael had passed first on the plays and was sliding into second; the ball in McPherson's hands touched him before he reached the base.

In a fraction of a minute it was all over. The umpire was signalling to Michael that he was out; Poole and Rorbach had started in from their positions; Owen was unbuckling his protector. Still Patterson stood and stared, unable to believe that

his rescue was complete. And then, like the explosion set off by an electric spark, the audience waked to the situation. The whole Seaton company rose *en masse*, waving arms and hats and banners, and sent forth a formless, exultant roar; while the recreant cheer-leaders turned their backs on their chorus and danced frantic jigs before the benches.

So ended the first half of the eighth, with the score two to nothing. The Seatonians were soon disposed of. Poole, over-eager, struck out. Owen hit to O'Brien and was thrown out at first. Rorbach made a pretty single into centre field, but came to grief when he tried to stretch it into a two-bagger. Hillbury came in for the last trial!

"Only three outs!" thought Wally, complacently. "Only three outs now!" ran the whisper along the Seaton benches, but expressed in timid hope rather than in confidence. Runs might precede those outs; these Hillbury men could not forever be checked on the bases. The courage rose when Hood sent Durand an easy chance, and was out at first. Then Coy bunted safely,

and took second when Patterson threw wide to Ames. Kleindienst hit to Patterson, and was put out at first, while Coy was held on second. Two out, but a man on second! The spectators drew labored breaths; the cheer-leaders on either side, fearing to add to the strain upon their champions, hung silent on the scene before them.

Webster, after two balls and two strikes, caught one on the end of his bat and sent it just out of Hayes's reach. On this scratch hit Coy was advanced to third. Again men on first and third, this time with two out! Ribot was at bat, nerved and resolute; and Rob felt a dread — almost a conviction — that a ball within his reach would be hit safely. On the other hand, in the desperate situation in which Hillbury stood, Webster was bound to steal, so as to make two runs possible in case of a hit. Patterson waited for his catcher's signal. The game hinged on Owen's decision. An error in judgment, a fault in execution, and the peril which had been warded off for nine long innings would be upon them. A tie at this stage, Rob knew, would mean defeat.

He called for a swift, wide ball. Webster feinted a start, hoping to draw a useless throw to second that would let Coy in. Rob hesitated, took a step forward, and pretended to throw; then wheeled and sent the ball to Durand. Coy was nailed as he scrambled back to the base — and the game was won.

The score: —

SEATON

	ab	r	bh	po	a	e
McPherson, 2 b.	4	0	1	4	3	0
Poole, lf.	3	1	2	2	0	0
Owen, c.	4	1	1	4	4	0
Rorbach, rf.	4	0	1	1	0	0
Ames, 1 b.	3	0	1	10	0	0
Durand, 3 b.	3	0	1	4	1	1
Sudbury, cf.	3	0	0	1	0	0
Hayes, ss.	2	0	0	1	3	1
Patterson, p.	3	0	0	0	3	1
Totals	29	2	7	27	14	3

HILLBURY

	ab	r	bh	po	a	e
Michael, lf.	4	0	0	1	0	0
Hood, ss.	4	0	0	2	3	0
Coy, cf.	3	0	2	1	1	0
Kleindienst, 3 b.	4	0	0	1	2	1
Webster, 1 b.	4	0	3	11	0	0
Ribot, c.	3	0	0	4	0	0
O'Brien, p.	3	0	0	1	3	0
Furness, rf.	3	0	1	1	0	0
Rounds, 2 b.	3	0	1	2	2	1
Totals	31	0	7	24	11	2

Seaton	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	—2
Hillbury	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0—0

CHAPTER XXVI

RECOGNITION

Was there a celebration?

Ask Wally Sedgwick, who ought to be able to furnish a detailed account of it, for he followed the procession from its formation, and having stayed out an hour longer than the time set in the parental permission was in consequence compelled to go to bed at seven every day during the following week. He didn't complain; it was inconvenient, of course; but, after all, the celebration was worth it.

Rob saw three of the newspaper accounts of the game. The first paper, which had previously predicted an easy victory for Hillbury, declared that Seaton played in great luck, "bunching hits for tallies and being helped out of several deep holes by stupid Hillbury base-running." The second asserted that the victory was due to "Patterson's steadiness and the fine all-round work of the

Seaton infield, in which McPherson was the bright and particular star." The third, after commenting on the fact that Hillbury men were frequently on bases but seemed unable to get round to the home plate, added: "Patterson showed himself, if not a great pitcher, at least one who can use his head as well as his arm. Men on bases never feazed him; the more there were, the better he pitched. Coach Lyford deserves great credit for the excellent team work. Owen threw well to bases."

Owen threw well to bases! And only one paper had discovered that! Rob laughed scornfully as he tossed the papers down. So this trifling mention was all the glory his achievement was to yield him. For a moment he felt hurt — but only for a moment. Soon his good sense and natural modesty reasserted themselves. He had not sought glory; he had not striven to display himself. His ambition had been first to help win the game for Seaton and then to vindicate himself as against Borland. Both these objects had been attained; what more could he fairly ask? Poole and Patterson and Lyford evidently

appreciated his work; his friends and acquaintances, from Lindsay and Laughlin down through a whole range to the Pecks and the Moons and even Payner, had all, in one form or another, expressed to him their admiration. That ought to satisfy him.

"Who's going to be captain next year, Rob?" asked Simmons, a few days afterward.

"I don't know yet — probably McPherson. He's been two years on the nine, and after that bully game he put up on Saturday, he deserves it."

"The fellows were saying it would be McPherson," said Simmons, looking up into Rob's face with an expression of keen regret. "I was hoping you'd get it. You know so much about the game, and have helped them all so."

Rob flushed. The suggestion touched him in a sensitive spot. "Nonsense!" he retorted sharply. "What put that idea into your head? I'm no better than any one else. For heaven's sake don't suggest that to any one outside; they'd think it came from me."

On his way over to the baseball meeting that

afternoon Rob was waylaid by Laughlin and Ware, who insisted that they had something important to say to him.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Rob.

"You're coming back next year, aren't you?" asked Ware.

"Of course, if they'll let me," Owen replied in a tone of surprise. "Why?"

"We were just talking about the prospects of the teams for next year," said Ware, smiling shrewdly. "When our class goes, there'll be a pretty big hole to fill."

"Oh, a few poor sticks will be left," Owen observed sarcastically. "In baseball McPherson and Ames and Patterson and I form quite a bunch. Then there's Hendry and Milliken and Buist as a foundation for the eleven. They're about as good as you find 'em. Rohrer and Wolfe are pretty respectable left-overs for the track. If any one can get new material out, Rohrer can. We might be worse off."

"That's a fact," nodded Laughlin. "You've got two good captains in Hendry and Rohrer anyway."

"And McPherson will be just as good," added Rob, promptly. "That makes three."

"Yes, that makes three," repeated Laughlin, with a look of amusement stealing over his broad face. "Only I'm not so sure about McPherson."

"Well, the baseball men are, and we ought to know," retorted Rob. "What's this important thing you wanted to tell me?" he added, turning on Ware.

Ware grinned across at Laughlin. "What was it, Dave? I can't think, can you?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied the football man.

"Here! let me through!" commanded Rob, who now perceived that the pair were holding him up for their own amusement. "I'm ten minutes late for the meeting already." And he charged past the two triflers toward the room at the end of the corridor.

"You're late!" declared Poole, as Rob opened the door of Number 7. "The election's over."

"I'm sorry. Dave and Ware tackled me outside and wouldn't let me by."

"Your vote wouldn't have been any use, any-

way," remarked Durand. "It was a unanimous vote."

"All right, then," said Rob, looking round at the row of smiling faces. He didn't see why they should all grin so and stare at him. "I'm with the rest."

"Glad to hear it," said Poole, with a wink at his neighbor. "Here's the result."

Rob took the slip of paper and read with a thrill of astonishment and joy that for a few seconds deprived him of the power of speech: —

"Unanimous choice for Captain of the Nine — Robert Owen."

And here we leave our embarrassed catcher vainly struggling for fitting words in which to express his gratitude. His experiences as a Seaton senior, with the vicissitudes of the captains three, are recorded in the chronicles of "The Great Year."